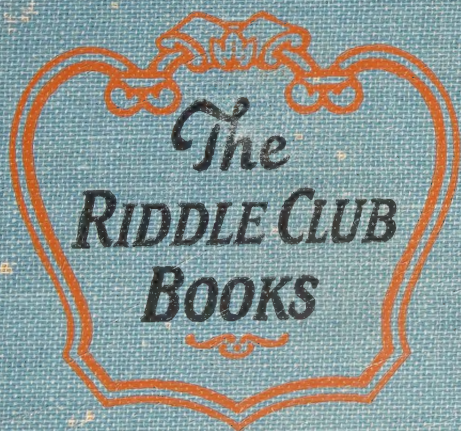



The RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP



ALICE DALE HARDY



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Matrice C. Bedford
September 10, 1925.



THE OLD MAN WAS EVIDENTLY THIRSTY AND HUNGRY.
The Riddle Club in Camp. Frontispiece—(Page 105)

THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP

How They Journeyed to the Lake
What Happened around the Campfire
And How a Forgotten Name was Recalled

BY
ALICE DALE HARDY
AUTHOR OF "THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME,"
"THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE
HOLIDAYS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
WALTER S. ROGERS

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BY ALICE DALE HARDY

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THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME

THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP

THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

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The Riddle Club in Camp

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THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP

CHAPTER I

THE CLUB MEETS

"WELL," said Artie Marley, thoughtfully, "I suppose it's the last meeting we'll have till school opens."

"Why, we're going to meet right through the summer!" his sister, Polly, objected. "You know we are!"

"I meant the last meeting we'll have here," explained Artie.

A smile went around the Riddle Club. Pretty Margy Williamson had a dimple that showed when she was pleased. Jess Larue giggled outright, and her brother, Ward, punched Fred Williamson so violently in the ribs—just to show that he felt happy—that Fred cried "Ow!" and pretended to come at Ward with both fists.

"You bet it's our last meeting here!" chuckled Fred. "It's a good thing, too. This room is getting too hot to be comfortable."

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"That's because it's near the roof," said Jess, rather apologetically.

The room was in her father's barn and she felt responsible for its comfort.

"Oh, any room would be hot in July," declared Polly Marley, sensibly. "That's why I love to think of going to the lake. Just imagine sleeping in a tent!"

"Swimming!" said Fred Williamson, kicking out with his feet as though he already felt himself in the water.

"You go swimming now," Artie reminded him.

"Yes. But I have to ask every time and Mother worries herself stiff," said Fred. "Up at the lake it isn't too deep. I'll teach you to swim, Artie."

Ward Larue, who was fat and round, looked at them blissfully.

"Potatoes, roasted in the ashes!" he exclaimed. "Bacon and eggs cooked out of doors! Say!"

"Trust Ward to think of the eats!" said Fred, and they all laughed.

"You can laugh," retorted Ward. "But I notice when it comes time to eat, I'm not the only one who turns up."

Margy Williamson nodded sympathetically.

"I love marshmallows, toasted," she announced.

"We must have a roast some night."

Jess Larue jerked the tie of her middy blouse around straight.

"Has this meeting been adjourned?" she asked. "I want to say something if it has."

"It hasn't been adjourned—yet," said Polly Marley hastily. "Fred had a riddle he wanted to ask."

Polly was the president of the Riddle Club, and though there were other officers, the members usually looked to her to tell them what was to be done.

"Fred," she said now, "didn't you have a riddle you wanted to ask?"

Fred Williamson's head was out of the window and Ward Larue had to pull on his coat to bring him in where he could hear.

"I thought I heard men shouting," explained Fred. "Were you asking me something, Polly?"

"I asked you," said Polly, patiently, "if you didn't say you had a riddle? A funny one, you said."

"That's right, I did have a riddle," replied Fred. "Wait a minute till I get it straight—Oh, it goes like this: 'When is butter like Irish boys?' "

"It isn't," said Margy, Fred's twin, placidly.

"You're lazy and don't want to guess," scolded Fred.

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"I think it's too hot to work," said Margy, but Artie Marley waved his hand excitedly as he did when he wished to recite in school.

"When you beat it, Fred!" he cried. "When you beat it!"

"Beat what?" asked Fred, a little surprised.

"The butter. And they beat Irish boys—don't you see?" insisted Artie.

"I never knew they did," said Ward. "Who told you they beat 'em?"

"I read it in a book," replied Artie.

Fred had once said that Artie read every book in the world, but of course no one has ever done that. Artie did the best he could and read every book that came into the house and, since he remembered practically everything he read, he was always able to recall a story to fit his experiences. If he said that he had read that Irish boys were beaten, Fred did not doubt it must be so.

"Only that isn't the answer to the riddle," he said kindly.

"'When are Irish boys like butter?'" murmured Ward Larue, dreamily. "When they are eating potatoes—Say, Fred, that ought to fit in some way. Potatoes and butter go together."

Ward's sister, Jess, shook her dark curls merrily.

"How silly you are, Ward!" she exclaimed.

"You have twisted everything around backward. The riddle is, 'When is butter like Irish boys?' Go on and tell, Fred; we can't guess."

"Yes, we'll all give up," said Polly. "There are no forfeits anyway, because this is the last meeting. What is the answer, Fred?"

"Nothing to it," said Fred. "It's an easy riddle. Butter is like Irish boys when it comes in little Pats."

"Oh!" cried Polly.

"Pats!" exploded Ward. "What are pats?"

"Mother makes the butter into pats for the table, Ward," said Jess, quietly. "Little flat cakes, you know."

"And here's another kind of pat," said Fred, leaning over to tap Ward on his dark head, none too gently.

"And Pat Maguire is another kind," declared Artie, naming the young station agent at River Bend. "He's the butter kind."

"The riddle kind, you mean," corrected Margy, giggling. "Why don't you adjourn the meeting, Polly, so Jess can tell us her news?"

Polly stood up, a dignified young president.

"Will some one make the motion?" she asked.

"I move that the meeting be adjourned," said Margy, quickly.

Fred seconded it and the last meeting of the

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Riddle Club in its own clubroom was over. True, they intended to meet during the summer, but it would not be in the barn.

"Now tell us, Jess, quick!" urged Margy, who had her share of curiosity.

The three boys said never a word, but they made no move to go. Usually they tore out of the room with a whoop and raced to see which should be the first to reach the loft ladder.

"Well, you know Carrie Pepper," began Jess Larue, importantly.

They all knew Carrie Pepper. She lived near the Larue place, and, besides, wasn't she president of the Conundrum Club?

"She's going to Lake Bassing!" said Jess.

If she had wanted to make a sensation, she had succeeded. Polly Marley stared and Margy Williamson frowned.

"Then I'm going to stay at home!" declared Fred Williamson.

"Don't be silly," was Jess's reply to this. "She won't be in our camp. Six of the Conundrum Club members are going to camp, but they'll be off somewhere by themselves."

"Who told you?" demanded Polly.

"Carrie did. I met her this morning. I do honestly think," said Jess, with some indignation, "that she never would have thought of going to

camp if it hadn't been for us. She never went camping before."

"I thought she was going to a regular girls' camp," said Margy.

"That fell through," answered Polly. "She told me. Too expensive."

"I don't see why the Conundrum Club had to pick on Lake Bassing," grumbled Fred. "Is that the only place in the world to go camping?"

"No, but I guess it's one of the best," said Polly, slowly. "Every one who goes camping from River Bend goes there, you know. You can't blame the Conundrum Club for choosing the lake. They won't bother us, I'm sure they won't. Do you know who is going, Jess?"

"Carrie Pepper," said Artie Marley earnestly.

"Yes, Carrie, of course," agreed Jess. "And if Carrie goes, you can count on Mattie Helms. And I think Joe Anderson is going."

"That's why he was in the store this morning, buying a camp knife!" cried Artie, excitedly. Mr. Marley, Artie's father, kept the hardware store in River Bend. "Albert Holmes was with him. He bought some rope."

"They'll probably have three boys and three girls," said Polly, wisely. "Though I should think all the Conundrum Club would want to go, if some of them do."

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"No, three of the fellows are going off to a big camp," Fred explained. "I don't believe they had this planned when school closed, or we should have heard of it. I don't believe Joe Anderson—or Carrie Pepper, either—ever had an original idea."

"I don't think camping is such an original idea," objected Polly, mildly. "And there's room enough at the lake for half a dozen camps. Don't let's fuss."

"Hark!" cried Margy. "What was that?"

"Oh, nothing," Ward Larue answered absently. "Did I show you my camp knife? It's a beauty! Daddy gave it to me."

"Yes, and you promised not to hack anything with it," his sister Jess reminded him. "The last knife you had, you nearly whittled a leg off the parlor sofa."

Ward looked at his sister with as much exasperation as his round, good-natured face would permit.

"That's when I was a kid," he retorted scornfully. "I guess I know enough to let furniture alone by this time! But when we get to camp I'm going to carve my initials all over the place."

"I *do* hear shouting!" repeated Margy. "Look out the window, Fred, and see if you don't see something."

The window had a screen, but it had been taken out earlier in the meeting. Fred thrust his head outside and looked. Through an opening in the trees he could see into the fields that bordered the Larue and the Pepper land.

"I see some men running, but I can't see what they're chasing," he reported. "Hear them yell!"

Shouts came more clearly up to the little room under the barn roof now, but it was a confused noise and impossible to tell what those who shouted were saying.

"Let me look!" cried Artie, thrusting his head out beside Fred's.

At that moment Fred saw what the men were chasing. He caught a glimpse of something huge and black and white. A tremendous bellow came up to him.

"Brewer's bull is out again!" shouted Fred, pulling in his head and facing the startled Riddle Club.

"He's running all over the field!" Artie reported. "Gee, look at him pawing the ground!"

Six heads crowded into the small space afforded by the window. Six pairs of eyes stared at the great animal who stood pawing the grass in the field, his head held low. Across the field

came four men, running. They carried poles in their hands.

"He's headed right this way!" screamed Polly, suddenly. "Come on, we'd better go in your house, Jess!"

They rushed for the edge of the loft and the ladder. No thought now of padlocking the club-room door, though that was Ward's proudest duty after each meeting. Now they wished only to reach the house in safety.

The loft ladder was near and they reached it swiftly. But fast as they ran, the bull had been swifter. As Margy put her foot on the first rung, there was a crash and a sound of splintering wood. Then heavy hoof-beats on the barn floor below.

"There he is!" shouted Fred, peering over the edge of the loft. "He's smashed down the door!"

CHAPTER II

AN UNINVITED GUEST

MARGY drew back and the others crowded closer to look over. Glaring up at them, they saw the wicked red eyes of the black and white bull. He was an immense animal, handsome, but vicious-looking. You had only to see the splintered barn door—which had been partly open—to know what he could do with his great powerful head and his terrible hoofs and heavy, battering body. Brewer's bull could smash his way through "any fence in the township" the people in River Bend said.

"The ladder!" cried Ward suddenly. "Pull up the ladder—quick!"

Artie and Fred bore down heavily on the ends of the ladder and it tilted outwards. The bull saw it moving and with a bellow of rage he started for it. But the boys pulled it up into the loft intact.

"How are we going to get down?" asked Margy, fearfully, as the animal, balked from one attack, clattered over the barn floor heavily, ap-

parently seeking something on which to vent his rage.

"They're shouting—come on to the window!" cried Fred, turning suddenly and running toward the clubroom.

The rest ran after him and found him talking to an excited group of men outside the barn.

"You kids stay where you are!" called a red-faced, gray-haired man whom they recognized as Mr. Brewer, the owner of the bull. "You'll be all right up there and we're going off to get some more pitchforks and a chain or two."

"Keep perfectly still and don't irritate the beast any more than you can help," called another man. "If we can't get you down any other way, we'll send for the firemen's ladder and take you down from the outside; but we plan to get the bull out of the barn first."

"Every one of you promise to stay where you are," said Mr. Brewer again.

The children promised, and the excited group went off to get weapons with which to fight the bull. One man, armed with a pitchfork, went around to the front of the barn to see that the bull did not come out before they were ready for him. It was a good deal safer for the rest of the town to have the animal inside Mr. Larue's barn than roaming through the fields or streets.

"Wonder if he thought we didn't know any better than to jump down there where the bull is," said Artie, when the men had gone away.

"I guess Mr. Brewer was afraid we might try to get out from this window," said Fred wisely. "We could, too, if we had some sheets to tie into a rope, or a real rope, long enough to reach the ground, or a ladder. The loft ladder wouldn't reach that far, would it, Ward?"

"Miles too short," answered Ward.

"Besides, we promised to stay here," said Polly. "I don't feel exactly comfortable, with a bull rampaging around downstairs, but I don't see that we can do anything but wait."

And while they are waiting, you may be interested to hear how the Riddle Club came to be meeting in the barn.

Polly Marley had thought of the Riddle Club. It had been her idea that spring and she had organized it and had been elected president. Polly and Artie Marley were the children of the hardware dealer in River Bend, a quiet little town on the beautiful Rocio River.

There were four other members of the Riddle Club—Fred and Margy Williamson, twin brother and sister, whose daddy owned the town's department store, and Ward and Jess Larue, the children of the president of the steamboat company

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which owned several boats that traveled up and down the river.

If you have read the first book of this series, "The Riddle Club at Home," you know that the Williamsons and the Marleys lived next door to each other on Elm Road in River Bend and that Ward and Jess Larue lived across the street. It was their father who had given the Riddle Club the room in the barn loft to meet in, and all the members had taken great pride in fitting it up comfortably and attractively.

The first book tells of the early meetings of the club and of the formation of a rival organization, known as the Conundrum Club. Carrie Pepper, a near neighbor, had been made the president of this club. It was Carrie's suggestion and that of her friends that had been responsible for the great contest between the two clubs, a riddle contest which the Riddle Club had won. But before this victory, they had had a number of exciting meetings of their own and had succeeded in solving the mystery of the stolen radio sets, radio sets ordered by Mr. Marley and for which Mr. Larue's steamboat company was responsible until they could prove they had been delivered.

That was the reason a handsome radio set now stood in one corner of the Riddle Club's clubroom. It had been given them because they had found the

thieves who had made way with the sets, and they were prouder of their wireless than of the several prizes they had won for solving difficult riddles.

"Are we going to take the radio to camp with us?" asked Fred, suddenly.

"Oh, yes, do let's," put in Artie. "It will be lots of fun to have it up there."

"Perhaps none of us will ever get to camp," said Margy, gloomily. "That old bull may decide to spend the summer downstairs."

"I think it would be fun to go out the window on the firemen's ladder," declared Jess, who was something of a tomboy.

"I don't—it's too far to the ground," said Polly.

"Maybe they'll spread a net and we can jump into it," suggested Artie. "I read about a fire in a book and they did that."

"Didn't you ever read about a bull in a book?" asked Ward, hopefully. "Perhaps it tells somewhere what to do when a bull is on the barn floor."

"You jump and dodge," said Artie, confidently, "and the bull slips and loses his balance."

"Now what in the world are you talking about?" demanded Fred. "You never read of a bull in a barn, did you, Artie?"

"I guess I know about bull fights, Fred Wil-

liamson!" Artie retorted, earnestly. He was the youngest of the children and sometimes he had to talk seriously to make them stop teasing him.

"Bull fights in Spain," he now added. "But I guess a bull in the United States isn't so different."

"How can we jump and dodge when we're up here and he is down there?" Ward wanted to know.

"We could go down," said Artie.

And then Polly and Margy fell upon Artie and dragged him back from the door and reminded him that he had promised Mr. Brewer to stay up in the loft.

"I didn't mean to go down—the bull might not slip if I did dodge," declared Artie, grinning. "I just wanted to hear what you would say."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't go and see what he is doing, though," said Fred. "Seems to me he is mighty quiet."

They all tiptoed through the door of the club-room, out into the loft proper, and over to the edge, from where they could see the floor of the barn. The bull was nowhere in sight.

"Say!" Ward's round, fat face flushed red with excitement. "I'll bet I know where he is! He's in the box stall!"

"Where Grandpa used to keep his best horse?" asked Jess.

Ward nodded. Years ago, before Jess and Ward had been born, the Larue stable had been the property of their grandfather who had had horses and carriages, handsome ones, too. Ward's father had kept a horse or two, afterward, until he bought an automobile. But since Ward and Jess could remember, no horses had been in the barn. This box stall was large and roomy, and Grandfather Larue had built it for his favorite trotting mare who was used to much petting and every horse comfort. This "Lucinda" was the horse Jess called the "best" horse.

"If he's in there, they could shut the door and he'd be caught," said Ward. "There's a bolt on that door."

"Huh, that bull can go through an iron door," declared Fred.

"But he lives in a box stall at the Brewer farm," explained Ward. "I heard Daddy say so. That bull probably thinks he's home now, in his own barn."

The Riddle Club, five of them, stared respectfully at Ward, the sixth member.

"Maybe you're right," said his sister, Jess. "But we can't go down and bolt the door. We promised to stay here."

"Call the man and tell him," suggested Margy. "Who is that outside?"

"I don't know," replied Fred. "I didn't notice who stayed. Anyway, I think he's gone to sleep."

"We can call," insisted Margy. "But we don't want to disturb the bull; he might come out again."

"Let's give one yell," Polly suggested. "Then, if he doesn't hear us, we'll wait."

Fred counted. "One—two—three——"

"Hey! Hi! Ow! Ki! Say! Ho!" shrieked the Riddle Club, in six different keys.

"For the love of Lulu!" The figure of a man with a pitchfork over his shoulder, appeared in the barn doorway. "Anybody killed?"

"The bull!" cried the six little dancing figures, hopping up and down on the edge of the hay loft. "The bull! He's in the box stall and you can lock him in."

"You don't say!" said the man, who didn't seem at all excited. "And what's to prevent him tearing the door down, if I do?"

"He won't—he likes box stalls," cried Ward. "He thinks he is at home in his own barn."

The man scratched his head. He was a stranger to the children, for he was a hired man on the Brewer farm—a large place on the edge of the town—and had not worked there long.

"Lock the door!" cried Fred. "I'll come down and do it, if you're afraid."

But Margy wouldn't listen to this. She caught hold of Fred's coat and hung on as though she thought she could serve as an anchor or a weight.

"Don't you dare go down, Fred Williamson!" she scolded.

"I'll shut the door, but don't blame me, if that bull hammers it down," said the man, walking slowly across the barn floor.

"Such a snail!" whispered Jess to Polly.

"It isn't so easy to go around catching wild bulls," said Polly, more charitably. "I don't blame him, if he is scared."

The farmhand reached the door of the box stall at last and pushed the door shut. Then he slipped the loop over the button and waited for the bull to show his displeasure.

"Guess he will stay there, after all," he said, when no sound came from the stall.

With a clatter of iron chains and pitchforks, half a dozen men rushed into the barn. Mr. Brewer was with them. They had come to take the bull prisoner.

"Where is he? Where is he?" they asked excitedly.

"Oh, he's all right," said the farmhand. "Nothing to handling him, really, if you use a little common sense. I just drove him in that

stall and shut the door and he never fussed a bit. A knack with animals—that's what I have."

The listening Riddle Club gasped. Then Jess began to snicker.

"A knack with animals!" she mimicked.

"Hush—don't let him hear you," said Polly.

"You kids stay where you are," ordered Mr. Brewer. "We'll have to take the bull out the front door. Don't come down till I tell you to."

"Some one's coming up the post," whispered Ward. "See it shake."

He pointed to one of the poles that supported the loft and which extended above it for a foot or two.

Sure enough, the slender pole was shaking as though some one was wriggling up it.

CHAPTER III

CAMPING PREPARATIONS

WARD and Fred and Artie, and Jess, as well, had climbed up to the loft too often by way of the poles, not to know that some one was coming up.

"Who in the world——" Margy began, but just then the head and shoulders of a man came into sight.

He was the man who had been left outside to guard the bull.

As the children stared, he scrambled over the edge and drew himself up on the old, dried hay that littered the loft.

"I don't intend to get myself killed," he announced. "When they go to drive that critter out, there's going to be tall doings, or my name isn't Frank Day."

A clatter of hoofs on the barn floor announced that the bull was already being driven. Fred peered over and saw Mr. Brewer leading him by a chain fastened in a ring in his nose. Three men followed with pitchforks held ready in case the

beast should prove balky. But the great black and white animal showed no signs of wishing to be troublesome. He moved slowly and majestically across the floor and out into the sunshine as though he were taking a little walk and enjoying it very much.

"There—he's gone," said Ward. "I guess he's tired of galloping around. He acted as if glad to go home."

"Well, there's no sense in risking your neck—you've only got one," said the man who called himself Frank Day, beginning to go down the ladder which Fred and Ward had slipped into position.

The children waited till he had gone, following the bull at a safe distance, and then they climbed down. They were a little dazed themselves.

"All you need is a knack with animals," said Fred, as he waited for Ward, who had gone back to lock the clubroom door.

And that was to prove a by-word in the club, one of those phrases that make the ones in the secret laugh and outsiders privately wonder "how any one can be so silly." Each member of the Riddle Club, hereafter, would grin if any one said, "All you need is a knack with animals," but to Carrie Pepper, and the other members of the Conundrum Club, the words were quite without meaning. Of course that was one reason why the

Riddle Club liked to use them; a secret is pleasant.

With the final meeting of the Riddle Club, came days of frenzied preparation for going camping. Mrs. Marley and Mrs. Williamson and Mrs. Larue thought they had a great deal to do to get their children ready to go, but Polly and Artie and the twins and Ward and Jess were just as busy.

To begin with, there was the radio.

"I don't think you want to take that up there," said Mrs. Larue. "It is an expensive set and you won't look at it, once you get it rigged up."

"Oh, Mother, we want to listen at night!" argued Ward. "Fred knows how to put it up. We'll put it in the mess house and it won't be hurt a bit."

The mess house served as dining-room for the camp and sitting-room, too, when the weather was too unpleasant to be out of doors. It had a roof and a floor and screened sides.

After a little more talk it was decided that the radio set might be taken—if the boys would promise to take it down and carry it to the lake and be responsible for the parts and their safe return.

Then Margy introduced the subject of "maids." Margy dearly loved show, and if she hadn't been such a sensible little girl, with sensible friends, she might have been called the least bit snobbish.

"The Conundrum Club is going to have a maid

to cook," announced Margy, finding the Riddle Club assembled in a circle on the clubroom floor while Fred carefully took down the radio set.

"A maid to cook!" repeated Polly, scornfully. "How silly that sounds!"

"'Tisn't silly!" retorted Margy. "They're going to take Pauline, Mrs. Helms' girl."

"Next thing you'll come telling us they are going to take the piano and the best parlor furniture," said Polly, sharply. "We're going camping to have fun—we don't care what the Conundrum Club does. My mother says we shouldn't try to rival them."

Jess looked up cheerfully.

"Don't scrap," she said. "First place, I should think the Conundrum Club would need Pauline; there's six of them, you know, and Carrie said the other members might come to visit during the summer. It makes a lot of dishes to be washed. Mother said she'd have to depend on us to help her, because Dora is going to stay and keep house for Daddy."

"We're all going to help," said Polly, confidently. "It will be fun to do dishes and cook outdoors. I won't mind it a bit."

So that settled the question of "maids." Dora, who was Mrs. Larue's helper, was to stay and run the house and Mr. Marley and Mr. William-

son were to eat with Mr. Larue. Week-ends they hoped to come to the camp. The three mothers were to be there all the time.

"Listen to that racket!" cried Ward, jumping up so suddenly that he tangled his feet in the wire.

He leaned out of the window and saw Mr. Marley standing underneath.

"Does the Riddle Club live here?" called Mr. Marley, with a crash that sounded like cymbals.

"Yes! Yes!" half a dozen eager voices answered him.

Bang, bang, went two tin plates.

"I have something for them, then," said Mr. Marley. "But I think they'd better come down. I'm not prepared to climb a ladder."

He certainly was not. When the Riddle Club members had tumbled down the ladder and out into the yard, they stared at him in amazement. He seemed to be a kind of walking tin peddler. Tin cups hung from his coat sleeves, knives and forks protruded from his pockets and a teaspoon was pulled through either buttonhole on his coat lapels.

"You see," he said, when he had turned around so that they might see him from all sides, "when you go to camp, each child should be his own dishwasher. Saves Mother lots of trouble."

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"I know!" shouted Artie, pouncing on his father. "You've brought us mess outfits!"

Mr. Marley smiled. He had brought a cup, plate, knife, fork and spoon for each boy and girl, and, wisely enough, he insisted that the outfits should be packed at once.

"The neighbors have enough to endure without being asked to listen to tin music," he said firmly. "Besides, the plates will get dented if any more tunes are played on them."

Though Margy from time to time reported that "Carrie Pepper is going to take a trunk" and "Mattie Helms has three new sweaters," it was agreed that plain clothes, mostly khaki, were to be worn by the Riddle Club in camp.

"Khaki blouses and bloomers for the girls and khaki suits for you boys," said Mrs. Marley. "That is sensible and suitable, and you can tear through the woods to your hearts' content. There are no laundries at Lake Bassing and we'll have to depend on finding some woman who will wash for us, or else send the clothes home to our washerwoman here. But white pique dresses and fancy sweaters are absolutely out of place on a trip of this kind."

"Where's the Conundrum Club going, anyway?" asked Fred, curiously, of his sister. "Seems to me we hear an awful lot about them."

"I don't know just where they're going," said Margy. "But I don't believe they'll be very far away from us."

"I hope they're miles away," declared Fred.

There remained one more important thing to be settled before the Riddle Club could feel ready to go to camp.

"What about the money in our bank?" suggested Fred. He was club treasurer.

"We were going to buy pins," said Jess.

"I don't believe we have enough," said Fred. "Anyway, we don't want pins now. We might lose them in camp. We can either save the money till fall, or spend it."

Mrs. Larue, who overheard him, laughed.

"Better save it, Fred," she advised. "A good treasurer never encourages expenditures."

"Well, I think myself, we'd better save it," answered Fred, with a sigh. "I have so much trouble digging up the ten-cent pieces every meeting, I hate to see them used up."

This was rather unfair to those who paid their dues as promptly as their allowances permitted, but they knew Fred was a good treasurer, if he did like to rattle the money in the bank until the others had to cover their ears to shut out the noise.

While Margy thought of what to wear and Fred of the club finances and Polly was trying to

learn to cook—she had set her heart on being able to cook in camp—and the mothers planned and packed and compared notes, Artie was absorbed in schemes of his own. Artie was the youngest of the six and probably the most independent of them all. When he thought of something to do, he went and did it and asked advice after it was done.

Joe Anderson had a gun. And, argued Artie, what would life in camp be without a gun? He might shoot game for the campers, or frighten away robbers or learn to shoot at a target. The more he thought about that gun, the more he wanted it.

"I'll sell it to you for two dollars," offered Joe Anderson.

"But won't you want it in camp yourself?" asked Artie.

"No, I don't think so. If I do, I can come over to your camp and borrow it," said Joe. "Want to buy it?"

"Yes, I do," said the frank Artie, "but I haven't two dollars."

"I thought you said there was that much in the bank," said Joe. "The club dues, you know."

"I can't buy a gun with the club dues, can I?" retorted Artie.

Joe Anderson said he didn't see why not.

"The gun will—will protect the whole club," he argued. "And, anyway, some of those dues belong to you. It was your money."

Still Artie couldn't be persuaded.

"Well, then, how much money have you?" said Joe.

"I have a dollar," Artie admitted. "It's in my pig bank."

"All right, I'll sell you the gun for a dollar," said Joe. "Get me the dollar and it's yours."

Artie rushed home and shook the dollar—in dimes, nickels and pennies—out of his china pig bank. He ran all the way back to the Anderson house and turned over his savings to Joe, who gave him the gun in return.

The gun was almost as long as Artie. He was very proud of it and marched down the street, carrying it over his shoulder. When he met Mrs. Morris, a friend of his mother's, she stopped him with a little scream.

"For pity's sake, Artie Marley!" she cried. "What are you doing with a gun like that?"

"We're going camping and I have to have a gun," explained Artie. "You need a gun in camp, Mrs. Morris, to protect people with. And then when you want meat for dinner, you go out and shoot it."

"You're more likely to shoot yourself," said

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Mrs. Morris, shaking her head. "I don't believe in boys having guns."

Artie went on with his gun and the next person he met was Fred.

"Where did you get a thing like that?" demanded Fred. "What do you call it?"

"There's nothing the matter with it," said Artie, stoutly. "I bought it from Joe Anderson."

CHAPTER IV.

ALL ABOARD

"WELL, then, if you bought that gun from Joe Anderson, there is something the matter with it!" said Fred, triumphantly. "Joe Anderson wouldn't sell it if it was all right. How much did you pay for it?"

Artie told him while Fred was examining the gun.

"Is there anything the matter with it?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing much," replied Fred, handing it back. "The trigger is gone and the cartridge holder, but aside from that, it's a pretty good gun. Of course you can't fire it, but that's the last thing you'd want to do with a gun, so don't let that worry you."

Artie knew that Fred was sarcastic, but he went hopefully home, intending to ask his father to mend the bargain gun for him. Unfortunately the three mothers saw him from the Marley front porch and they descended on him in an excited flurry.

"Artie!" cried his own mother. "What are you doing with that awful thing? Drop it this minute."

"It might go off!" said Mrs. Larue. "Don't drop it—put it in a barrel of water."

"Mother, it isn't loaded," announced Fred, who had followed Artie.

"Don't tell me—I never heard of a gun that went off and killed some one that was loaded," replied Mrs. Williamson. "Take it away, Artie; that's a good boy."

Artie and Fred tried to explain that the gun was harmless, but no one would listen to them. They had to leave the gun under the porch and promise solemnly not to touch it till Mr. Marley came home.

As soon as he saw the wonderful bargain Artie had made, Mr. Marley went into fits of laughter. It was the largest gun and the most useless in River Bend he told his son. Strangely enough, Mrs. Marley seemed pleased to find that the gun was no good.

"I meant to ask you to tell Artie to march right back to that Anderson boy and get his money back," she said. "But if the gun is broken, there is no reason why he shouldn't have it."

"I don't want a gun that won't shoot," pro-

tested poor Artie. "I thought Daddy could fix it for me."

"It's too old to be mended, Son," said Mr. Marley, kindly. "And you can have fun, carrying it, if you don't mind the weight. It *looks* like a fine weapon."

So Artie decided to take his gun to camp, after all. Both his mother and father and Fred and the rest of the Riddle Club as well, thought Joe Anderson had been very tricky to sell a worthless thing to the younger boy, but, as Mrs. Marley said, the dollar wasn't worth arguing about, especially as Artie's purchase was likely to give him many happy hours in spite of the trick.

The morning on which the Riddle Club was to set out for camp dawned fair and sunny. Elm Road was the scene of great activity, as early as half-past five. The boxes, in which the mothers had packed the cooking things and the bedding, had been sent the day before, but no matter how many things you may send on ahead, there is always plenty left over to be carried to your destination. I am sure you have noticed that.

The trip was to be made on the *Swanee*, one of Mr. Larue's steamboats, and the arrangement was for the party to meet at the Larue house as soon as the early breakfasts were finished. Mr.

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Larue was to take them the short distance to the wharf in his car.

"Perhaps it would be wiser to have a truck," said Mr. Larue, when he found the nine people waiting for him. "I thought you sent the stuff on ahead. Seems to me a load went down on the afternoon boat."

"Oh, it did, Mortimer," replied Mrs. Larue, smiling; "but these few things are the ones we must have first."

Mr. Larue looked at Mr. Mailey and Mr. Williamson, who had come to see their families off, and they all laughed.

Each mother carried a box or a basket that looked like lunch. They explained that they would have no time to cook while they were settling the camp.

Polly held an armful of riddle books, which had been forgotten till the last moment and almost left behind—she insisted that she meant to study riddles for the rest of the summer.

Fred was trundling his bicycle. He said it would be handy to do errands for his mother—when he had mended it. Fred liked to tinker, and most of his possessions needed mending often. He could have sent the bicycle on the boat with the other freight, but he had not made up his mind that it could be mended till that very morning.

His pockets were stuffed with tools and screws.

Artie, of course, couldn't carry anything but his gun. It was fearfully in his way, because it was so long, but he clung to it desperately and fell over it patiently—he wanted it so.

Margy was lugging a suitcase. She had been utterly unable to resign herself to the prospect of khaki skirts, blouses and bloomers with nothing more ornamental than a middy tie. So she had persuaded her mother to let her take some of her pretty dresses and had promised to carry them herself.

Ward had the radio set and several books which were to tell him how to put it up in the woods bordering the lake. When the time came to do the actual work, Fred would probably be the one, but Ward claimed the honor of carrying the set to the camp.

Curly-haired Jess was responsible for her father's second shout of laughter, when she appeared around the corner of the porch. Jess had evidently considered a camping trip something in the nature of an exploration. She had so many things slung around her neck on strings and chains that she clattered as she walked. Her knife, fork, spoon and cup, were each hung separately; so were the little camera, the old field glasses that were not much more reliable than Artie's

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gun, the jackknife some one had given her, and a silver whistle.

"You look like a Christmas tree," said Fred. "Are you going on the boat like that?"

"Of course," replied Jess. "Why not?"

Mrs. Larue smiled at her daughter.

"We're going camping and every one is to do as he or she pleases, within reason," she said solemnly. "So clatter along, Jess, and have a good time. But I hope, with all my heart, that we are the only people on the boat."

They climbed into the car, not without difficulty, for Artie's gun was in every one's way and Jess caught her strings in the door handle and had to be unwound while there seemed to be no place at all for Fred's bicycle. However, the three daddies, with marvelous patience, managed to stow away everything and down to the wharf they whirled, where the *Swanee* was already tied up, waiting.

"There's Carrie Pepper!" whispered Polly, as Mr. Larue drove down close to the landing.

"And Mattie Helms," said Margy. "And Joe Anderson. See, there's Mrs. Pepper! I'll bet the Conundrum Club is going on the *Swanee*, too!"

Sure enough, there were the six members of the Conundrum Club who were going to camp, as-

sembled on the wharf. A pile of boxes and trunks were beside them and Mrs. Pepper and Mrs. Helms seemed to be giving directions about them. There were two other ladies, but they simply sat on a trunk and watched, without trying to give directions; they were Mattie Helms' Aunt Ruth and Mrs. Holmes, the mother of one of the boys who belonged to the Conundrum Club.

"Better go right on board," advised Mr. Larue, leading the way toward the boat.

"Oh, Mr. Larue!" called Mrs. Helms, as soon as she saw him. "Can't you get some one to carry our baggage on board? We're awfully late now."

Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson went on with the Riddle Club party, while Mr. Larue stayed behind with Mrs. Helms and her party.

"The *Swanee* doesn't take freight, 'count of the mail," whispered Ward to Fred. "There's no time to load. They ought to have sent their stuff yesterday."

"We mustn't take up too much room with our traps," said Mrs. Larue, leading the way to the forward deck. "The *Swanee* may not be a freight boat, but we're making it look like one."

"But, Mother, there's plenty of room," argued Jess, as her mother tried to bring their nine chairs

into a rather close circle. "There's all that space on the other side and upstairs."

"Let the Conundrum Club go upstairs," said Ward, carelessly.

"This deck is the only shady one in the morning," said Mrs. Larue, gently, "and I hope none of us is selfish enough to wish more space than he needs."

Mr. Larue came hurrying up to them after the first whistle had sounded. The second would be the signal to cast off.

"Couldn't get all that stuff on, Amy," he said to Mrs. Larue. "I'm downright sorry, but it should have been attended to yesterday. Mrs. Helms says a lot of their cooking things are in the boxes. I'll have to send it on by the afternoon boat."

"We have plenty to eat, ready cooked," said Mrs. Larue. "Some of the children can go over to camp and take them anything they want. Don't worry, Mortimer."

Mr. Larue looked warm and tired, for he had had a hard time convincing the late comers that the *Swanee* could not be held for freight. The shrill blast of the second whistle sounded, and with a hurried kiss from each of his children, the three fathers hurried off, promising to be "up on Saturday." The *Swanee* groaned gently, swayed a little, and slipped out into the stream.

"Now we're off!" announced Fred, with great satisfaction.

"Where are the Conundrum Club?" asked Margy. "I didn't see them come on."

"I think they went up to the second deck," said Polly. "I saw Pauline come on board and go up, and I imagine that's where they went."

"Mother, you said we could take things to them to eat," said Jess, curiously. "Are they going to be in our camp?"

"Near us, but not in our camp," answered Mrs. Larue. "You see, chicks, we have leased one of the islands for our camp and I understand that the Conundrum Club has taken the next one. Our island and theirs each has a bridge to the mainland, but there is no bridge between the first and second island. In other words, our camp will not be connected with theirs."

"But the water between is shallow and easily waded," put in Mrs. Marley. "You children can wade it, without going by bridge to the mainland and back again."

"I don't imagine we'll wade it often," said Polly, rather primly.

"Don't be too sure, Polly," said her mother. "You may be so hungry to see a new face before we leave camp that you'll wade the water voluntarily just to see Carrie Pepper."

The trip to the lake was a delightful sail, about three hours long, allowing for two stops at river towns. Jess created some excitement among the passengers by her equipment, but she did not mind being laughed at. The six chums tramped over the boat thoroughly before the trip was over and visited every nook from the top deck to the engineroom. Of course, for Mr. Larue's sake, the crew were especially nice to them, and the decision was almost unanimous that as soon as they grew up they would each run a steamboat on the Rocio River. Even the girls.

"Now we're coming to Lake Bassing, so do let us keep together," said Mrs. Larue. "The only way to get to the island is to walk, and we'll have to take it slowly, because it is warm. My goodness, what is the matter?"

Down the deck came flying Pauline, Mrs. Helms' maid. Her face was white and she had lost her hat. She leaped for the gangplank, and if one of the deck men had not seized her, she would have jumped into the water.

CHAPTER V

LAKE BASSING

"HERE, here! what is the matter?" asked the captain, looking in astonishment at the struggling young woman.

"She says some one wants to shoot her, sir," said the man who had kept Pauline from jumping overboard.

Around the corner of the cabin came Artie, cheerfully lugging his gun. At sight of him, Pauline began to struggle again.

"There he is!" she shrieked. "He's coming this way!"

Mrs. Marley hurried to head off Artie, while the captain and the deck hand and the other members of the Riddle Club, together with Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Williamson, explained to Pauline that the gun was an old one and broken and could not, under any circumstances, "go off" and shoot her.

Pauline was convinced, after a while, but she eyed Artie warily until he and the gun disappeared up the street.

Lake Bassing was the name of the town where the wharf landing was built, but the lake itself was about a mile and a half inland. The town was not large—a few houses and a few stores with a post-office and a creamery, practically all built on the main street, were about all one saw in Lake Bassing.

"Going over to the lake?" a voice hailed them.

Mrs. Larue was surprised. There stood an automobile bus, bright and shiny and new, and a smiling-faced young man, evidently the driver, faced her, cap in his hand.

"Why, I thought we'd have to walk!" said Mrs. Larue. "We always have. And when I came up to see Mr. Irvine about the camp a few weeks ago, I walked to the island and back."

"I'm just starting in business," explained the young man. "This is my first season. But if I make good, I'll keep it up. We seem to have a lot of summer folks up here this year, and walking two miles, more or less, every time is a bit hard on them."

"I never was so glad to see a car in my life," said Mrs. Marley, smiling. "Can you take us all over to Tom's Island, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Plenty of room," he answered promptly. "My name is Dick Hare. Hop in, youngsters."

The children, who had been standing waiting with wide-open eyes, needed no second invitation. Gun and camera, radio and kitchen knives, they tinkled and tumbled up the steps and settled themselves on the long seats.

Mrs. Williamson hung back.

"What about the Conundrum Club party?" she asked, in a low voice. "They'll want to get over to their island, too."

"I can't take more this trip, but I can be back here in twenty minutes," said Dick Hare, pleasantly. "I try to keep a regular schedule and the captain will tell them. There's a waiting room on the wharf."

He started the car and they were off for Tom's Island. Not a very beautiful name, perhaps, but the Riddle Club had heard it all their lives. These islands dotted Lake Bassing, and the three oftenest used for camps were named Tom's, Dick's and Harry's Island, respectively. Each had a bridge to the mainland. The Conundrum Club had taken Dick's Island and, Mr. Hare informed them in answer to a question from Fred, Harry's Island was occupied by two elderly sisters who were artists.

"Do you live in Lake Bassing?" Polly asked politely.

"In the summer," he answered, turning out to

avoid a lumbering wagon coming from the direction of the lake. "In winter I teach in the city. Your boxes came all right and Mr. Mains took them over to the island yesterday afternoon," he added, turning to Mrs. Larue.

"I'd like to run a bus," said Fred enviously, thinking what fun it would be to make money that way.

"It has its good points, like any job," Dick Hare admitted. "And then it has its objectionable points, too. Are you counting on much hunting this year?" he asked, turning a little to look at Artie, who sat directly behind him.

"That gun's for protection," Artie informed him gravely.

"It won't shoot, but it can scare people stiff," said Fred.

"Island bridge," announced young Mr. Hare, stopping the car. "Sorry I can't run you over, but the consequences might not be pleasant."

He helped the three mothers down carefully and tried to help the children, but they bounced down so quickly that no aid was needed.

"Come over and see us," said Mrs. Larue, as she paid him. "We expect to be here for the summer."

"I go past twice a day, on schedule," Dick Hare explained, "and oftener, if I bring out pas-

sengers or am sent for; so any time you want to go into town, I'll be glad to take you."

"That's a comfort," said Mrs. Marley, "for I do not like to take long walks."

"Good-bye, Dick Hare!" cried the Riddle Club, as he climbed into the car and turned it. "Come to see us, won't you?"

The three mothers were a little surprised, but, as they later discovered, every one in Lake Bassing called Dick Hare "Dick" and he made friends quickly with nearly all he met.

It was easy to see, the moment one looked at the island bridge, why they had been set down on the mainland side. The bridge was too narrow for any car to go over it, though it was strongly and firmly built. It had to be, lest in the winter storms wash it away.

The three mothers led the way and the Riddle Club followed hilariously. As soon as she was on the island, Mrs. Williamson unfolded a small package she carried.

"Three cheers for Riddle Camp!" she cried. "Fred, run up the pennant."

And there was the pennant she had made to surprise the Riddle Club, a narrow triangle of dark blue with "Riddle Camp" worked out in yellow letters across it. Yellow and blue were the Riddle Club colors.

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"Come on, Ward! Get the flag, Artie!" cried Fred, excitedly. "Let's have our flags up before the Conundrum Club comes."

There was a small, slender flag pole at the head of the island, near the bridge, and Mr. Williamson had given the Club an American flag, first getting the boys and girls to promise that they would put it out each morning and bring it in at sunset.

"No flag out all night in your camp—promise!" he had said.

Artie knew where the flag was—folded carefully in Margy's heavy suitcase. She had it out in a minute and no one as much as looked at the camp until the Stars and Stripes were run up on the pole by Fred and the pennant of Riddle Camp flying beneath it.

"Now let's see everything," said Jess, when the flag ceremony was over.

"Please," interrupted Mrs. Williamson, "bring all those traps of yours into the mess-house. We must be orderly or we'll find ourselves in a terrible tangle. You children can sort your belongings more easily if they are put down in one place and sorted from that center."

So the gun and the radio and the other equipment were neatly placed on the floor of the mess-

house, where the boxes which had been sent on before were also found.

Riddle Camp consisted of two large sleeping tents, each mounted on a floor and fitted with mosquito proof curtains at the flaps—though they knew that there were more flies than mosquitoes at the lake. One of these tents was immediately reserved for the three mothers and the girls and the other tent was given over to the boys. When the fathers came up over Sunday, there would be room in the boys' quarters for them.

Then there was the mess-house, a more pretentious place, with four windows and a full-length door, though the walls were canvas, like the tents. A kitchen "lean-to" was attached to the mess-house, and this proved a great disappointment to Polly.

"I thought we'd do the cooking outdoors, over a campfire," she told her mother.

"So we shall, but not all our cooking, dear," answered Mrs. Marley. "What about rainy days? I agree with you it will be fun to roast potatoes in a campfire and toast marshmallows and bacon and broil fish—if you children catch any—but give me an oil stove to get three regular meals a day. Nine hungry people are going to require large quantities of food."

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The only other building in the camp was a storehouse, fitted with a padlock, to which Mrs. Larue, who had rented the island, had the key. This was where their supplies would be kept.

"The ice man and the butcher and the grocer come every day," said Mrs. Larue, "and that will be a big help. Lake Bassing is getting to be a summer resort—there are two rows of new cottages built on the opposite shore, they tell me."

"There's the Conundrum Club," whispered Fred to Polly. "See 'em going over the bridge?"

Polly looked and saw a procession passing over the bridge that led from the mainland to Dick's Island. The water between the two islands was shallow enough for wading, but the islands were quite widely separated. One might, by shouting, make himself heard from one to the other, but ordinary noises would not carry.

"I wish one of you children would run down and stop that nice Dick Hare as he is going back," said Mrs. Larue. "Ask him what we do about the mail."

The whole Riddle Club was most willing to go, and they ran across the bridge pell-mell, just in time to see the bus pass them swiftly.

"Dick Hare!" six voices called in concert. "Dick Hare, stop a minute!"

"Hello!" he called, stopping the car and look-

ing back. "Anything the matter? Did the gun go off and frighten you?"

"Of course not," panted Artie, reaching the wheel first. "Mrs. Larue wants to know what we do about the mail."

"It will be delivered to you, once a day, if you put out a box," explained Dick Hare, promptly. "Nail a mail box up on a post here—this fence post will do—and leave word at the post-office. Time was when you could use any old box, but not now; you have to conform to the postal regulations."

The Riddle Club sat down on his running board to get its collective breath.

"By the way," said Dick Hare, slowly, "do you happen to know the folks who have rented the camp next to yours?"

"Sure we do!" answered Ward. "They live in River Bend."

"Well, I had a great argument with them," declared Dick. "They had a lot of boxes and barrels and some trunks and they wanted me to load half the stuff in my machine. Rope it on, you know, and put some on the top. I couldn't make them understand that I am doing taxi service and taxi only. Mr. Mains has a horse and team, and he does the hauling. I won't compete with him, and he knows it. But those women were mad

enough to walk to the island when they couldn't make me take their freight."

Polly, in a few words, outlined the Riddle Club and the Conundrum Club for him. He was much interested.

"I've had old-fashioned spelling bees in my school," he said, when she had finished, "but I do not know that I have ever heard of a Riddle Club. I'd like to attend a meeting some day."

"I'm the president and I invite you to come any time," replied Polly, heartily. "We'll let you know when we are going to hold a meeting."

"Thanks. Some day when I have time, I'll come," he promised. "I must get back to town now, to keep my schedule running."

"My goodness, here comes Carrie Pepper!" cried Margy, pointing down the road, as the car drove rapidly away.

"Look at the size of the basket she's carrying," put in Jess. "A regular market basket."

"Where's your mother?" called Carrie, long before she reached them.

CHAPTER VI

CAMP RIDDLE

FRED groaned and Artie and Ward tried to imitate him, but they squeaked instead.

"Now, what do you suppose she wants of my mother—or yours?" demanded Jess, crossly.

"Do hush!" cried Polly, trying not to laugh. "Carrie will hear you."

"Where's your mother?" called Carrie again, hurrying up to them.

"In the camp. Do you want her?" said the six members of the Riddle Club in chorus.

"Well, I want to see some one," said Carrie, rather out of breath from her running. "We need a lot of things in our camp."

Polly led the way back over the bridge. They found the three mothers in the mess-house, busily at work unpacking. Mrs. Larue was hanging up the kitchen things in the lean-to and Mrs. Marley was laying out blankets for the cots. Fred and Margy's mother had a broom and was brushing up the string and paper and bits of trash that always come with unpacking and settling.

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"Well, Carrie," said Mrs. Marley, pleasantly, when she saw the newcomer, "how are you over in Camp Conundrum?"

"Oh, that would be a nice name, wouldn't it?" cried the delighted Carrie. "I never thought of that! I s'pose that's what that flag I saw meant—you've named your camp 'Riddle Camp.'"

"Camp Riddle," Margy corrected.

"Means the same thing," said Carrie. "I think 'Camp Conundrum' is lots nicer for a name. I'm going to tell my mother to make us a flag like yours."

"Have your boxes come, Carrie?" asked Mrs. Larue, coming in from the kitchen.

"No, they haven't—that old bus driver was too mean to bring them out for us. Some old man has to bring them with a horse and wagon, and Mother says it will be night before they get here." Carrie talked so fast she fascinated Jess, who stared at her. "And when they do get here," rattled on Carrie, "we won't have a thing to cook with. Mr. Larue let us load only about half our things, and those we need most are still at River Bend."

"The morning boat doesn't carry freight," Mrs. Larue explained mildly. "Mr. Larue really stretched a point to load the boxes and barrels he did for you."

"Don't you want to take a box of lunch back with you, Carrie?" said Mrs. Marley. "We brought plenty, because we didn't want to have to cook the first meal. I'll send your mother enough to last her till to-morrow morning when her things will probably arrive."

"Oh, I have a list," returned Carrie, calmly. "Mother said she knew you had plenty of food cooked for lunch. She wants you to send her some of that and then she wrote down what she'll need for supper and breakfast. And she wants two frying pans and some blankets, and a box of matches, and plenty of potatoes, and a hot-water bottle if you have one. She forgot to pack hers."

Jess was not the only one who was staring now. The older folk as well as the children looked a little startled.

"But—but, Carrie," protested kind Mrs. Marley, "I'm not sure we have all those things or can spare them. And if we have, you'll never be able to take them back. You couldn't lift the basket."

"No, I know I couldn't," replied Carrie, calmly. "But the boys can. I thought Fred and Artie and Ward would bring the basket back."

"You'd better take this box of sandwiches and cake back with you now," said Mrs. Williamson, after a moment's silence. "It's lunch time and

we're all hungry. We'll send you over everything we can this afternoon, tell your mother."

"All right," and Carrie shuffled off.

"Now don't say a word," counseled Mrs. Marley, when Carrie had gone. "Not a word! No one could possibly say it all, so we won't begin."

"But, Mother!" said Polly. "Mother, what have they in those boxes that *did* come on the boat?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied her mother.

"Oh, clothes and do-dabs to trim up the camp," said Fred, bitterly. "I don't see why we have to take a lot of truck over to them this afternoon. We wanted to explore the island."

"You wouldn't have time for that, anyway," said his mother. "We'll need you to help us settle this camp and collect wood for our first fire. To-morrow morning you will have plenty of time for exploration, and you can make an early start."

They had lunch out of doors, like a glorified picnic with the two flags flying gently in the breeze and the sparkling water lapping the little sandy beach at their feet. Tom's Island sloped down to the water and rose sharply at the other end. Mrs. Larue said the woods they saw at the back of the camp bordered a bluff.

"It won't be hard to help the Conundrum Camp, if each of you will pretend you're a special messenger," said Mrs. Marley, when lunch was over. "I'll give each of you a package, and please tell Mrs. Pepper and Mrs. Helms that we are sending everything we can spare."

"And some we can't," said Margy, ungraciously.

"Why, Margy Williamson, what a thing to say!" Mrs. Williamson said quickly. "Some day you may be glad to borrow something, and then you'll be sorry you weren't more neighborly when you had a chance."

"Don't stay," cautioned Mrs. Larue, as Polly's mother brought out the blankets, which the boys were to carry. "They will be busy and you mustn't hinder them. Besides, you'll want to collect the wood for our first campfire."

"Why couldn't we wade over to their island?" asked Jess, struck with a new idea.

"Because you might drop half these things," said Mrs. Marley, handing her the frying pan to carry.

Jess had also the coffee and coffee pot, Polly had the hot-water bottle, matches and a bag of salt, while Margy was to take the potatoes.

"There, I think that's about all you can carry,"

said Mrs. Marley, when they were ready. "I'm sorry I couldn't send everything on that list, but the blankets load the boys down so."

The six chums set off, going by way of the bridge and down the road to the bridge that connected Dick's Island with the mainland.

"Do you suppose they'll bring this stuff back, or shall we have to come and get it?" asked Fred, gloomily.

"They'll bring it back," said Polly, confidently. "Mother won't borrow, 'less she simply has to, and then she can't rest till she has returned the thing she borrowed."

But, sad to relate, not all borrowers are as prompt to return their borrowings as Polly's mother was. The utensils and comforts sent over to Camp Conundrum were not returned for more than a week—days after the boxes had come—and then only when Mrs. Larue sent word that they needed the things in their own camp. For the first six days the grown-ups had coffee brewed in a little tin pail, and then Mr. Marley sent up a new coffee pot from his store. That was lucky, for the borrowed one never was returned. Mrs. Pepper had forgotten to pack hers and, as she said, it was too inconvenient to make coffee in a pail.

However, of course the Riddle Club could not

see ahead and know what was to happen. They marched cheerfully to the next camp and delivered their goods and the messages.

"Stay and play around," urged Joe Anderson. "We're going swimming this afternoon, if the bathing suits come. They're in a trunk at the wharf."

"We can't stay," replied Ward. "There's the radio to put up, and wood to gather, and I think Mother said something at lunch about going after eggs and milk. There's a farm down the road where they sell such things."

But they took time, nevertheless, to go over Camp Conundrum pretty thoroughly.

It was a larger and more expensive camp than theirs, for there were three sleeping tents and each was fitted with windows and doors, like the Camp Riddle mess-house. Then Camp Conundrum had an outdoor fireplace, built of rocks cemented together, a large dining-room and kitchen and more furniture throughout.

"If our things ever come, we ought to be comfortable here," sighed Mrs. Helms. "But I'm afraid to stay here at night."

"We ought to have a dog," said Joe Anderson.

At this point Polly insisted they must go back to their own camp, so they took leave of the Conundrum Club and walked back over the bridge.

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"I wish we had an outdoor fireplace," said Ward.

"Huh, we're going to have a campfire every night—Mother said so," Artie declared. "That's just as good."

"It would be nice to have doors and windows in the sleeping tents," murmured Margy.

"If you're going to camp out, why not do it?" asked Fred, scornfully. "We have doors and windows at home. Give me a real tent to sleep in."

"And our island is much nicer, I think," said Polly. "Dick's Island is flat all over—no bluff and hardly any trees. There's nothing to explore."

So, when they had talked it over, the Riddle Club decided that Camp Riddle had all the advantages and none of the drawbacks of Camp Conundrum.

The rest of the afternoon was a busy time. Dick Hare came past on his second scheduled trip and left a mail box. He said he thought it would save them a walk into town. Fred had that nailed in place on the post in a jiffy.

They found plenty of dry wood near the camp, and the three mothers asked that it be picked up first, since the more of it gathered, the neater the appearance of the camp. There were logs piled

up under a light shed, which would give a "back log" for the campfire, but some light, dry wood would be needed each time to start the blaze.

The wood collected, it was necessary to go for eggs and milk. Of course all six of the children went, Polly and Margy carrying the tin pails. They found Mrs. Meade, the farmer's wife, to be a cheerful and friendly woman who told them that she would send the butcher and the grocer to their camp in the morning, when they stopped at her house.

"I'm going to get my bicycle mended and then I can go for milk on that," said Fred, when they were coming back with the supplies.

"I'd like to see you bring a pail of milk on a bicycle," scoffed Artie.

"You'd have butter," said Margy.

That reminded them that they had forgotten the butter—which Mrs. Marley had asked them to bring with the eggs and the milk—and they had to go back. But though the sun was warm, it was pleasant on the country road and a breeze blew off the lake and made them almost cool.

How good supper did taste that night! Every one was hungry from so much exercise and the girls and boys thought it great fun to be allowed to jump up and wait on the table and bring in the food. It was light enough to eat without a light,

though when they went out to start the campfire, a single star twinkled in the sky. Little insects drummed in the grass, and the water of the lake was without a ripple. Polly remembered what Mrs. Helms had said about being afraid to spend the night on the island.

"I think nights are the nicest times," said Polly to Margy, who sat next to her, and Margy agreed.

Presently the snap and sparkle of the fire cast a glow on the circle of faces, and in a few minutes they had to move further back from its warmth. The last sunset cloud faded, the gray twilight deepened, and a black, velvety night shut in softly around the island.

"How the stars shine!" said Margy, looking up at the sky.

But Polly was staring fixedly across the fire, into the blackness beyond. Fred started up. He, too, had seen something.

CHAPTER VII

THE EXPLORERS

"Lo-ok, loo-ok!" stuttered Polly. "What's that?"

She pointed, and every one turned to stare in the direction of her finger. They saw two glaring eyes blazing at them.

"A wildcat!" shouted Artie. "Wait till I get my gun!"

He had forgotten that his gun couldn't shoot, but, anyway, Mrs. Marley caught hold of his jacket and pulled him down beside her.

"The fire may have attracted some kind of wild animal," she said, a little breathlessly, "but it hardly seems possible."

"Perfect nonsense!" declared Mrs. Larue. "There is nothing in the woods. I'm going to see what that is. Come along, Fred."

Fred proudly went with her, and as soon as they had walked a few steps beyond the fire they saw the animal plainly. It was a large dog, and as they came closer, he showed his teeth and growled.

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"Well, I don't know that he is any pleasanter to have about than a wildcat," said Mrs. Larue, thoughtfully. "I don't want a stray dog prowling around all night. Here, Fred, where are you going?"

"I could make friends with him," said Fred. "I don't believe he's cross. Perhaps he is hungry."

"He may be hungry," Mrs. Larue admitted. "But he is also cross. I hear him growl! And, oh, my goodness, isn't he an enormous creature!"

For the dog had risen and now stood, still showing his teeth and growling. He was as tall as Artie, and Fred was sure that, if he were hungry enough, he could eat a boy.

"Maybe he belongs to the Conundrum Club camp; they wanted a dog," said Fred. "Let me take him back to their camp, Mrs. Larue."

"I'm not so sure he belongs to them," Mrs. Larue answered. "And I don't see how you are going to take him away, Fred. He is almost as large as you are, you know."

"Is it a dog?" called Margy. "Don't let him come near us. Take him away, quick."

Margy did not like dogs, and that was a pity for she missed knowing all the nice dogs, and there are more of those than cross ones.

"I'll need Ward and Artie to help me," said

Fred. "And if we each take a stick from the fire and run at him, I think he'll be scared and run."

Mrs. Larue thought so, too, and she and Fred went back to the campfire, where Fred explained his plan.

"Chase him toward the road, then," said Polly, "because, if he doesn't happen to belong to Camp Conundrum, you don't want to wish him on them. I don't see how a dog got over here, anyway."

The three boys selected three long sticks from the fire, sticks which had red embers and a fast-burning blaze. Jess quickly followed their example.

"We'll creep around back of him," said Fred, "and then he'll have to head for the road. I don't think you ought to come, though, Jess," he added.

"Just the same, I'm coming," was the brief and determined reply.

It was much more exciting than their most exciting Indian game had ever been, and for the first time in their lives the three boys had the feeling that they were actually protecting their mothers and sisters from an enemy.

Just as they had almost reached the dog, Jess stepped on a stone and fell, her brand flying from her hand. The dog turned his great head, saw

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three ribbons of fire so close to him that he could feel the heat, and with one howl he bounded forward. With his tail tucked between his legs, he raced for the bridge and the boys after him. Jess not picking herself up quickly enough to join in the race. They chased him several yards up the road, then turned and came back.

"He was headed for Camp Conundrum," Fred reported to the circle around the fire. "So he must have come from there."

"Well, I feel perfectly safe, with three boys to take care of us," said Mrs. Marley proudly. "And one fearless girl to help," she added, putting her arm about Jess.

And Mrs. Larue remarked that when she wrote home the next day she meant to tell Mr. Larue that it was Fred's quick wit that had driven away the dog with so little trouble.

Mrs. Williamson only smiled, but Fred knew his mother was pleased.

They were all ready for bed early and no more wood was put on the fire. When the embers began to fade, they put them out with earth and then separated for the night, the three boys going to one tent and the rest to the other. In less than fifteen minutes Camp Riddle was perfectly still.

Sometime in the night, Artie woke. For a moment he could not remember where he was, then he knew.

"Fred!" he whispered softly. "Fred!"

There was no reply. He put out his hand to touch Fred's cot, which was next to his. It was empty.

Just as Artie was about to get up and search for him, a dark figure came in at the opening. A moon had risen and it was no longer pitch dark.

"That you, Fred?" called Artie, softly.

Fred grunted. He put something down on a box and came over to his cot.

"Left the flag out," he whispered, as he rolled up again. "I just remembered it."

Sure enough, not one of them had thought of the flag. Fred, waking and recollecting their promise to Mr. Williamson, had gone out and lowered it and brought it back to the tent.

"I meant to ask you about the radio," said Artie, still whispering so as not to wake Ward. "When are we going to put it up, Fred?"

Fred did not answer. He was already asleep. So Artie wisely decided to follow his example and leave any more questions till morning.

The girls' tent showed the first signs of activity in the morning, and three khaki-clad little figures

were pumping water into a pail at the iron pump when Fred put his head out of the boys' tent and saw them.

"Lazy bones! Lazy bones!" cried Margy.

"Huh! I'm most dressed," called Fred, indignantly. "Besides, I'll bet Mother had to wake you up."

Mrs. Williamson was an early riser, and indeed she had been the first up, but, as she said when they sat down to breakfast, no one could complain of a late start.

"It's only a quarter to seven now," she said, glancing at her watch.

"Say, we forgot to bring the flag in!" cried Polly, looking distressed.

"I brought it in," replied Fred. "And I'll put it out right after breakfast. I meant to do it before, but I didn't seem to have time."

Breakfast over, Fred ran the flag up on the pole, carried in two pails of water for his mother, and took a postal card out to the mail box for Mrs. Larue. The girls cleared the breakfast table and made the cot beds, while Ward gathered light wood to start the fire that night and Artie swept out the mess-house and rolled up the nettings that covered the entrances to the tents.

"There! You've done your share of work for all day," said Mrs. Marley, when all this had been

accomplished. "We'll have your suits ready this afternoon, if you want to go bathing. What do you plan to do this morning?"

"Explore!" replied Ward and Artie together.

"We want to go around the island," explained Fred. "I was going to put the radio up, but that can wait. Morning is the best time to walk, because it is cooler."

"You'll be back for lunch, won't you?" his mother asked.

"Oh, yes, they'll be back," said Mrs. Larue, who knew all about the island. "They can easily go round the place in three hours. You might keep your eyes open for buried treasure," she added jokingly.

"We will," Artie promised. "Where's my gun? I want to take that." And nothing could persuade him to leave it behind, though Fred told him it was heavy and Ward said he needn't be expected to carry it when Artie grew tired and Polly laughed at him.

"I like it," Artie insisted. "I don't care whether it's any good or not, I like it."

Though the boys and girls started on the flat, sandy shore of the island to walk, it was not long before the coastline led them up on a bluff and then into a wood. After half an hour's walk they came to a clearing in the woods. Here some one

had sailed in a place from which it was possible to see the greater part of Lake Bassing. Islands dotted the water, and near their own island lay a triangular piece of land.

"That's Triangle Island," said Ward. "Daddy told me. You can see it from the boat."

"Who lives there?" asked Fred.

"Why, nobody," replied Ward. "At least, I don't think any one does. Mother had a list of the camping islands, and Triangle Island wasn't marked."

"Well, there's some one living there now," remarked Jess. "I see smoke. That must come out of a chimney."

She pointed to a thin line of smoke which floated above the screen of trees on the island.

"Maybe folks go there and have picnics," said Ward.

The boys and girls amused themselves a few minutes longer by looking at the islands and the water, waved to a passing motor boat, and then resumed their walk.

"How about that dog?" said Artie, suddenly.

"What about him?" asked Jess.

"I was wondering if he would come back to-night," said Artie.

"I don't think so," Fred declared. "I saw a piece of rope tied around his neck—it trailed on

the ground when he ran. That means he was tied up somewhere and they'll tie him again."

"We haven't found any buried treasure," said Jess, not greatly interested in the dog.

"I'll tell you," said Margy, her eyes dancing, "we can bury our own treasure!"

"But what?" asked Polly. "We haven't any."

"I have two rings and you have your wrist watch," suggested Margy. "Ward has a seal ring and Fred has a watch and a charm and Artie has his pocket-piece. And Jess—what have you to bury, Jess?"

"My chain and locket," replied Jess, unfastening the thin gold chain and tiny heart-shaped locket she always wore, sometimes outside her dress, more often underneath so that it did not show.

They used Artie's gun as a shovel; and, though it was not much of a shovel, it was better than none.

Polly was very proud of her wrist watch—it was a plain nickel one her father had bought for her to wear in camp—and she did not exactly want to bury it. But Fred seemed willing to bury his watch and Artie dropped in his precious pocket-piece—a coin his great-grandfather had carried in the Civil War—without a murmur, so Polly would have felt ashamed to protest.

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"There, level it all down nice and flat," said Margy, when the treasure was buried.

"How do we know where to find it?" asked Polly, doubtfully.

"It's just opposite the fourth tree from the woods," said Margy. "That's easy to remember."

Then Artie declared he was hungry and they hurried off home, as they already called Camp Riddle.

"Well, Fred, I'm glad you're back," said his mother, as soon as she saw him. "No one of us remembered to wind a watch last night, and we haven't the slightest idea of the right time. Is your watch running?"

Fred looked embarrassed.

"I—I guess it is," he said uneasily.

"Then tell me the time, quickly, dear," said Mrs. Williamson. "It must be nearly noon."

CHAPTER VIII

REGULAR DUCKS

FRED looked embarrassed.

"Well—now—now, Mother," he said uncertainly, "I haven't got my watch just now."

"You haven't it?" echoed Mrs. Williamson. "What have you done with it?"

"Polly!" called Mrs. Marley, from the kitchen. "What time is it?"

It was Polly's turn to look uncomfortable.

"I—I don't know, Mother," she answered.

"Why, where's your watch?" asked Mrs. Marley, appearing in the doorway. "Did you forget to wind it?"

"You see," said Margy, desperately, "we buried our things."

Mrs. Larue, who, seated on a camp stool outside the mess-house, had been stringing beans, began to laugh.

"What have you been up to?" she asked the children. "You look as though you had some great secret to be guarded."

"We buried them—treasure," said Margy again.

"Buried what?" demanded Mrs. Williamson.

"Our watches," said Fred and Polly.

"My chain and locket," said Jess.

"My rings," chimed in Margy.

Ward and Artie said nothing. They began to wonder if it would not have been better to have buried make-believe, instead of real treasure.

With a few more questions, the story was out. And though the three mothers laughed, they agreed that there was but one thing to be done.

"Before you forget where you have buried this treasure, march straight back and dig it up," commanded Mrs. Williamson. "And next time, if you must bury something, take trash that has no value."

It was not much fun, walking back through the hot sun to the place where they had buried their treasure, but the Riddle Club did it without a murmur.

"I suppose it was rather a silly thing to do," said Polly, soberly, when they reached the spot and had counted the fourth tree.

"Yes, the next time Margy has an idea, we won't listen," retorted Jess, who was hungry and inclined to be cross.

"There's your watch!" cried Artie, poking into the ground with his gun barrel.

In a few moments all the buried treasure was recovered.

After lunch every one felt better. Since they could not go bathing immediately after a hearty meal, Fred and Ward decided to put up the radio, giving the girls gracious permission to watch them.

"You hang around, Artie, and pick up the hammer when we drop it," advised Ward, as he started to climb a tree.

Artie laughed. He was good-natured and not easily ruffled. He had decided to clean his gun, and now sat down under the tree Ward was climbing. Fortunately, there were three or four trees near the camp, an advantage Camp Comandrum lacked. Their shade was most grateful on a sunny day, though Ward and Fred did not think of the shade. They thought, if they thought at all about it, that trees were just meant to hold radio aerals.

"You're not going to sit there, are you, Artie?" Polly asked her brother, in amazement.

"What's the matter with here?" he said comfortably.

"Why, if Ward drops the hammer, it will land on your head," Polly pointed out.

Artie consented to change his seat, in view of

this possible calamity, and he had just found a safe place a short distance off when Ward shouted down that he had forgotten to take the hammer with him.

"Let down a string and I'll tie it on for you," said Artie, patiently.

"There's Mother!" shouted Fred, from his tree. "Hey, Mother, where you going?"

Mrs. Williamson and Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Marley waved their hands. They wore broad-brimmed shade hats and each carried a strong paper bag, the kind that is used to hold a number of parcels.

"We're going to town for an hour or so," announced Mrs. Marley. "Dick Hare will run us in and back. At half-past two you can go bathing. But remember, you are not to go past the black stake. You've promised."

"We won't, Mother—don't worry," said Polly, like the capable little girl she was. "We'll be careful. And, Mother, will you tell Dick Hare that we're going to hold a session of the Riddle Club Friday afternoon? He might like to come."

Mrs. Marley promised to tell the bus driver about the meeting, and then the three mothers, with another word or two of caution about bathing in the lake, went over the bridge to the main-

land where the automobile met them and took them into town.

"You ought to be up here," called Fred, busily nailing cross supports for his aerial. "I can see clear over to Dick's Island."

"Can you see Joe Anderson?" giggled Jess.

"No. But they're going in bathing—there they come down to the water now," reported Fred. "Don't jerk the wire like that, Ward."

Ward protested that he wasn't jerking the wire.

"Let's go and put on our bathing suits," suggested Polly. "It will be half-past two by the time we're ready."

The girls went into their tent and found their suits laid out on the cots. They were trying on their caps when a wild shout from Ward sent them scurrying out. There on the ground lay Ward, in a tangle of wire and splintered wood. He had slipped and fallen and had brought down the equipment with him.

Luckily, he was not hurt, and he insisted on getting another piece of lath for the supports and climbing up to his perch again. He and Fred stuck to their job, and in another half hour were able to report that the radio "works fine."

By this time the girls were wading in the lake, though they insisted they were waiting patiently for the boys to join them.

"It's cold!" cried Margy, as Fred came racing down to the lake, resplendent in his black and red striped suit—he had selected it himself and his one regret had been that the stripes did not come wider.

Ward and Artie followed Fred, and, joining hands, the six gay figures marched out to the black post, beyond which they had promised not to go. Indeed, the post marked the limit for safe bathing and had been placed there as a warning.

The water was a little higher than Fred's waist and not quite up to Ward's and Artie's shoulders. It was not cold, once you were accustomed to it, and even Margy did not complain after she had ducked thoroughly.

"There's a dog in swimming!" cried Polly, pointing to a shaggy head that bobbed in the water some distance away.

"There! That's the dog we saw last night!" said Fred, positively. "He does belong to Camp Conundrum."

The children could see several figures playing about in the water near the shore of the other camp, and they knew these must be the members of the Conundrum Club.

"Let's shout to them," suggested Artie.

"Hello, hello!" bellowed Fred. "How's the water where you are?"



"HEY, JOE ANDERSON! YOUR DOG'S GOT JESS'S CAP."

The Riddle Club in Camp.

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One of the figures turned and they could see it was one of the boys—probably Joe Anderson.

"Hello yourself!" he called.

Jess snatched her red cap from her curly dark hair and waved it gayly as the other members of the Conundrum Club turned. Alas, the slippery bit of rubber eluded her fingers and went sailing across the water. It fell near the swimming dog.

"My cap!" cried Jess. "The dog's got it!"

She started after it, but Fred pulled her back.

"You stay back of that post," he ordered firmly.

"Hey, Joe! Joe Anderson! Your dog's got Jess's cap."

The dog had seen the bright red cap and made a snap for it. Now he was lazily swimming to shore, the cap in his mouth.

Fred whistled and Ward and Artie snapped their fingers, but the dog, of course, paid no heed.

"Joe!" called Fred again. "Make him give the cap back."

Joe cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Come and do it yourself!" he shouted.

And over the water came the sound of laughter—the Conundrum Club thought it all a joke.

"I don't care," said Jess. "My hair dries without much trouble. I don't need a rubber cap. Only Mother doesn't like me to get it wet every day."

"It was brand new," said Polly, indignantly. "And such a pretty one! I think it's a shame."

"You stay here," directed Fred. "I'm going to get that cap."

"We'll go, too," said Ward and Artie together.

"Let's all go," said Margy, who had not the slightest idea what her brother was planning to do, but who hated to be left out of anything.

"You stay here! We don't want any girls mixing up in this!" declared Fred. "Come on, fellows."

Polly's curiosity got the best of her.

"But what are you going to do?" she asked, as the three boys splashed their way to shore, Polly and Margy meekly wading after, leaving Jess to bring up the rear, so indignant over Fred's speech she could hardly move.

Fred shook himself like a spaniel and brushed the wet hair from his eyes.

"Do?" he repeated grimly. "I'm going over to Camp Conundrum and get Jess's cap back—that's what I'm going to do!"

"But you're in your bathing suit!" Margy protested, while Jess, somewhat pacified, found voice to murmur that she didn't care about "that old cap."

"Well," considered Fred, "I did think we'd go round by the road. But I don't see why we can't

wade over to Dick's Island. I don't believe it is deep."

They went back into the water and the girls sat down on the beach to watch. Nothing had been said about wading the distance between the two islands—the black post was merely the boundary line for the lake itself—beyond that the currents were swift and passing motor boats made swimming dangerous.

"It's easy!" Fred called reassuringly to the watchers on the beach, when he reached the bar between the two islands.

Indeed the water was surprisingly shallow, and that explained why the dog had found it so easy to visit the campfire the night before. Fred and his chums expected to meet Joe Anderson either in the water or on the beach, but when they touched shore there was no sign of any one about.

"Where do you suppose they've gone?" whispered Artie.

"Oh, they're hiding somewhere," said Fred, impatiently. "Hub! there's Carrie."

Carrie Pepper came toward them, wringing the water out of her skirt as she walked.

"Well, what do you want?" she demanded, not very graciously.

"Where's Joe?" countered Fred. "I want to see him."

"I don't know for sure, but I think he's about opposite Triangle Island by this time," replied Carrie. "One of the motor boats offered to take the boys in and they jumped at the chance."

This had probably happened while the Riddle Club had their backs turned, wading ashore.

"Do you know anything about Jess's cap?" asked Fred, shortly.

"For pity's sake! what would I know about it?" retorted Carrie. "You don't think I took her cap, do you?"

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER MEETING

"CARRIE!" Mrs. Pepper called. "Carrie, how many times do you want me to tell you to come in and get dressed?"

Mrs. Pepper came to the door of the tent house as she spoke and saw the three boys.

"Why, you're Fred Williamson, aren't you?" she said, in surprise. "And Artie Marley and Ward Larue, too. I suppose you want the coffee pot, but I declare I don't know how I'm to get along without it. Did your mother send you for it?"

"No'm," replied Fred, truthfully. "She didn't send us for anything. We just came."

"Did you want anything?" asked Mrs. Pepper, relieved to find she might still keep the coffee pot.

Fred shifted from one foot to the other. He did not like the idea of telling about Jess and her cap. That, he thought, was between Joe and him.

"We came to see Joe Anderson," said Artie, saving the day unconsciously.

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"Oh!" said Mrs. Pepper. "Of course. I might have known. Well, the boys went off in some one's motor boat. A crazy thing to do, I call it, without asking permission. They'll be back shortly, I hope. Do you want me to tell Joe to come over and see you?"

"No—no, thank you," said Fred. "He needn't bother. I'll come over again, perhaps."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Pepper, holding open the door for Carrie to pass through. "Carrie Pepper, you're the laziest girl I ever knew," the boys could hear her scolding as they turned away.

"There's the dog," whispered Artie.

Fred looked. The big dog lay dozing in the sun, outside the kitchen. Some one was singing softly inside. Pauline, probably.

"I'm going to ask her," said Fred, suddenly.

Pauline smiled brightly when she came to the door in answer to his knock. She was glad to see some one she knew. Camp was rather lonely for Pauline and the Conundrum Club not especially easy to please. They were somewhat critical young people.

"Lo, Fred," said Pauline, cordially. "How's your mother?"

"She's all right," returned Fred, hastily. "Say, Pauline, did that dog bring home anything to-day? I mean anything out of the water?"

"Sure he did," said Pauline. "Some day that dog's going to bring in one of these racketing young ones, too, if they don't stop teasing him. He's no little lap dog to play with—that dog ain't. He's a good watch dog, and the grocer loaned him to Mrs. Helms for the summer, but he warned the kids to let him alone. That dog's part wolf."

"What did he bring in?" asked Fred, as she paused for breath.

"Was it a red cap?" suggested Artie.

"A red rubber cap?" This from Ward.

"How did you know?" said the surprised Pauline, plunging her hand into her apron pocket and bringing out Jess's cap. "He came up to the kitchen door a little while ago and whined for me to open it. Then he put this down on the floor. He brings me everything he finds, because I'm the only good friend he's got. The kids tease him and Mrs. Helms is afraid of him and wants to keep him chained half the day. They let him out at night, though."

"That's Jess's cap," explained Fred, and then he went on to tell how the dog had happened to get hold of it.

"Joe Anderson is the meanest boy I ever knew," scolded Pauline. "He goes out of his way to be mean, too, and that makes him worse. You take

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this back to Jess, and when Joe asks about it, I'll just say I gave it back to you and he'll be too flabbergasted to speak for an hour. That'll be a mercy, for he talks all the time, as it is."

The boys thanked Pauline and Fred stuffed the cap in his pocket. They walked respectfully around the big dog, that had been staring steadily at them out of grave brown eyes. He neither growled nor wagged his tail—plainly he took life seriously, but would not attack any one unless first molested.

"We got it!" cried Artie, splashing up on the beach where the girls were waiting. "We got it, Jess!"

Jess was glad to have her cap back, and Polly and Margy more pleased to hear of the surprise in store for Joe Anderson when he should search for the afternoon spoils.

They were dressed and the bathing suits hung neatly on the line to dry when the three mothers returned, laden with bundles and news and the acceptance of the Riddle Club's invitation to Dick Hare.

"He says he'll be very glad to come Friday afternoon," reported Mrs. Marley, distributing ice-cream cones, a little softer than they were meant to be, but rapturously welcomed, nevertheless.

"And I think we might be invited, too," said Mrs. Larue, fanning herself with her large hat.

"You are—you are!" chorused six voices. "Every one is invited!"

"But you'll have to just sit and watch," said Artie, seriously.

"Yes, dear, I understand," his mother answered, smiling. "I know when we have guests at our club meeting, they are not expected to take any active part in the program."

The riddle books were studied openly and in secret the next few afternoons, and around the campfire at night. Artie could be seen moving his lips mysteriously as he asked himself riddles and answered them with great quickness and ease. Polly was curious to know whether the Conundrum Club was holding meetings while in camp, but something kept her from going frankly to Carrie and asking. For one thing, they had heard nothing from the other camp since the episode of the cap. Occasionally, at night, they were awakened by the barking of the big dog, and once he had howled at the moon for several hours. But as far as those in Camp Conundrum were concerned, Camp Riddle might as well have been deserted. To be sure, they had a generous share of the latter camp's equipment, but apparently

they made no plans for returning what they had borrowed.

Friday afternoon came finally, bringing with it Dick Hare. He seemed like an old friend to the club members now, for they had gone into town with him on several of his trips and he had stopped at the camp nearly every day to ask if there were any errands the mothers wished done. He had a way of doing this at many of the summer camps and homes in Lake Bassing, and it was small wonder he had so many friends. He might have made much extra money in this way, but he would allow no one to pay him for this sort of work.

"I'm always going back and forth, and it's no trouble at all to do an errand here and there," he would say, when some one offered him money. "Of course I charge for passengers—that's my business. But a small package or two don't make a bit of difference, and I'm glad to be accommodating."

"This is the first riddle club I have known," said Dick Hare, smiling as he sat down on the grass under the tree where the session was to be held.

"We've never been asked to a meeting till now," replied Mrs. Larue.

The three mothers sat on comfortable camp

stools and Polly had an overturned soap box to serve as a table.

"There isn't any business program this afternoon," Polly announced, when she had called the meeting to order. "So there is nothing to prevent starting right off with the riddles."

Fred scrambled to his feet.

"What about the dues?" he asked eagerly. "We have to pay our dues, you know."

Ward and Artie clasped arms and fell over, giggling. This was their way of expressing derision.

"Oh, Polly, don't let's have dues this summer!" begged Margy. "What do we want dues for?"

"Expenses!" answered Fred.

He had said it at every meeting of the Riddle Club and expected to go right on saying it. Thanks to Fred, there was now a tidy little sum in the bank they had left at River Bend. A treasurer often has trouble to collect the club dues, but the members regret the unkind words they speak of him when they read the amount in the club treasury.

"Why don't you want us to have dues, Margy?" asked Polly, trying to be fair and hear all sides.

"Well, I have plenty of reasons," said Margy, slowly. "But the best one, I think, is that ice-cream cones are five cents apiece. You can get

two for ten cents, and I would rather have cones than pay any silly club dues in the summer."

Dick Hare tried not to smile. It was so evidently a serious matter with Margy.

"I think Margy is right," declared Jess, unexpectedly. "It won't seem like vacation, if we have to save ten cents for every club meeting."

"And, besides, Fred," put in Artie, having stopped laughing, "we're not going to hold the meetings so regularly. Only just when we feel like it."

"Well, I don't care," said Fred, amiably, "if you don't. We have *some* money in the bank. And I can spend ten cents just as easily as Margy."

"Then that's settled, and we won't have any dues," declared Polly, with relief. "Now let's begin with our riddles."

"Forfeits, Polly?" interrupted Jess.

"Yes, of course," replied Polly.

The audience kept perfectly still while Ward, who was to ask the first riddle, tried to remember the one he wanted to ask.

"I know it just as well," he kept repeating. "It was something about—about—oh, yes, now I know: Artie, 'What is the difference between a barber and a sculptor?'"

"You always think up such hard ones," complained Artie. "What is the difference?"

"Oh, you ought to try," remonstrated Ward.
"You don't even try to guess, Artie."

"Let me guess," said Jess, eagerly. "Is it because a barber uses scissors and a sculptor uses a knife, Ward?"

"That isn't the answer," declared Ward.
"Any one else want to guess?"

"That's the kind of riddle," proclaimed Fred, "that no one could guess unless he had learned the answer. Go ahead and tell us, Ward."

"I didn't learn the answer," said Ward, calmly.
"It's in the riddle book. I'll tell you to-night."

The audience laughed outright, but President Polly was indignant.

"I think you ought to pay a forfeit, Ward Larue," she said severely. "The idea of learning a hard riddle and not knowing the answer yourself!"

"Well, it's a long answer," argued Ward, in his defense.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Polly.
"If you don't want to learn a long answer, choose an easier riddle. What will you give as a forfeit?"

"Doesn't Artie have to pay a forfeit?" asked Ward. "He couldn't guess."

"Both of you have to pay a forfeit," declared Polly, and she refused to listen to any appeals.

Ward gave up his seal ring and Artie his lucky-piece and peace reigned once more.

"Your turn, Margy," said Polly.

"Jess," said Margy, quickly, "why did Noah object to the letter D?"

"Because it made the ark dark," returned Jess, placidly. "I don't have to pay a forfeit, do I?"

"You knew that one!" said Margy, accusingly.

"Well, I can't help that. I didn't know you were going to ask it," said Jess, with excellent logic on her side.

But just as she said that, she gave a cry. Her right foot rose high in the air and her sandal sailed upward, to describe an arc and land on the soap-box table before the astonished Polly.

CHAPTER X

MORE RIDDLES

MRS. LARUE rose in alarm as Jess danced on one foot, shrieking:

"Kill him! Kill him!"

Dick Hare made a pass at something with his hat, knocked it to the ground and stamped on it.

"I caught it, Jess," he said, quietly. "It was a wasp. Stung you, didn't it?"

Jess nodded, tears in her eyes. The wasp had stung her on her instep and the sudden pain had frightened her almost as much as it hurt.

"Here's your shoe," said Ward matter-of-factly, and Jess was able to laugh at that.

Mrs. Larue dabbed a little cooling mud on the sting and tied her clean handkerchief about it. Jess put on her sandal and sat down again. The audience resumed its seats, and it was Polly's turn to ask Ward a riddle.

"And I hope you can guess it," she said, "because if you can't, that means you'll have two forfeits to redeem."

Ward nodded. "I never have much luck, guessing riddles," he said sadly.

"What is the only pain of which every person makes light?" Polly asked him.

"Do I have three guesses?" asked Ward.

"Three," replied Polly.

"Did you say the only pain?" asked Ward, with interest.

Polly nodded "yes."

"And everybody makes light of it?" inquired Ward.

Polly sighed, but repeated the riddle.

"Oh," said Ward. "I guess I wasn't listening so very hard the first time. Let me think."

They waited patiently for him to think. It seemed to be a strange and unusual process for Ward. He turned over on his stomach and put his face down in the grass. Now and then he wriggled his feet. But he said never a word.

Just as Artie was ready to poke him impatiently, Ward sat up.

"Window pane," he said calmly. "That's light."

The Riddle Club gazed at him, open-mouthed.

"Well, I never!" gasped the astonished Polly. "You did guess it!"

"That," said Ward, affably, "comes from thinking."

"Now, Jess, you ask Polly," directed Margy, as there did not seem to be any answer to Ward's remark. "She hasn't guessed yet."

Jess had her riddle at the tip of her tongue.

"How would you increase the speed of a very slow boat?" she rattled off.

Polly frowned in her effort to think of an answer.

"Fire the engine?" she hazarded.

"Wrong!" cried Jess.

"Throw the anchor away?" ventured Polly.

"Wrong!" declared Jess. "One more guess."

Polly thought for a few moments.

"Give her a tow," she said finally.

Jess shook her head.

"The answer is 'Take a rope and make her fast,' " she repeated.

Polly and Fred saw at once and the meaning came slowly to Margy, but Artie and Ward were bewildered.

"A boat can't move if it's tied," argued Ward.

"It won't make her fast to tie her," said Artie.

Jess was impatient.

"If you make a boat fast, you tie it," she said.

"Any one knows that."

"I'll have to give a forfeit," interrupted Polly, anxious to keep the peace. "Let me see, I guess my handkerchief will do."

Polly glanced at her watch.

"I think by the time the forfeits are redeemed, it will be time to adjourn," she said. "We want to take a swim before supper."

Mrs. Marley rose from her chair.

"Madam President," she said gravely, "I wonder if I might say a few words?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Marley," returned Polly, her eyes dancing. "We'd be glad to hear from you."

"I want to tell you," said Mrs. Marley, "how much we have enjoyed this session of the Riddle Club. And I should like to offer a prize to the boy or girl who succeeds in solving a riddle I will give you. If more than one answer is given correctly, I will give each a prize."

She paused and glanced around the circle with a smile.

"I thought," she went on, "that a compass, on a neck chain for a girl if the winner is a girl, or on a watch fob for a boy, if a boy wins, would be a handy prize."

A little murmur rose. If there was one thing the Riddle Club longed for, it was a compass!

"I'll ask Polly to write down the riddle now," said Mrs. Marley, "and then you can start to work on it. I'll hand the answer in at the next meeting."

Polly wrote carefully and painstakingly as her mother gave the riddle. This was it:

"What is that which comes with an automobile, goes with an automobile, is of no use to the automobile, and yet the automobile can not move without it?"

"That does sound like a brain-twister," said Dick Hare. "I'm going to study over that, just for fun."

Mrs. Marley sat down and Mrs. Larue arose.

"Madam President," she said politely, "may I say a few words?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Larue," answered the smiling Polly.

"I've had such a good time this afternoon," said Mrs. Larue, "that I want to make plans for another good time. I've been wondering if you couldn't arrange a meeting at which our ability to solve riddles might be tested?"

"You mean for us to ask you riddles?" suggested Polly, eagerly.

"Well, my plan was to hold a meeting some Saturday evening, when your fathers are in camp with us," explained Mrs. Larue. "We might invite Mr. Hare, too. And you children would be at liberty to ask us the stiffest riddles you could gather."

"Wouldn't that be fun!" cried Margy. "And will you pay forfeits, too?"

"Oh, forfeits, of course," replied Mrs. Larue. "We wouldn't shirk our payment. Well, what do you think of that plan?"

"I think it would be heaps of fun!" answered Polly. "Shall we hold the meeting next Saturday night—a week from to-morrow?"

"I'm sorry, but I'll be away over that week end," announced Dick Hare.

"Then make it two weeks from to-morrow, Polly," said Mrs. Larue. "That is better, anyway. You'll have more time to work on your own prize riddle and we'll be able to brush up our riddle memories, too."

So it was settled that a special session of the Riddle Club should be held two weeks from the next day and that the answers to Mrs. Marley's riddles were to be opened at the same time.

"Now for the forfeits," said Polly, briskly, when this had been decided. "Let's blindfold Mrs. Williamson and she shall say what we have to do to redeem our things."

They tied a handkerchief over Mrs. Williamson's eyes and Polly held Ward's seal ring over her head.

"Boy's or girl's?" asked Mrs. Williamson.

"Boy's," replied Polly.

"He must climb a tree and sing like a bird," commanded Mrs. Williamson, gaily.

Ward groaned. He didn't mind climbing a tree, but he didn't want to sing.

"You have to," said Fred. "Hurry up, Ward. Call it singing, anyway. A noise will do."

So Ward went over to the nearest tree and climbed into its branches. He sat on a limb and swung his feet.

"'Bring the good old bugle, boys!'" he began, in a mournful tone that made his mother cover her ears.

"That's enough," said Mrs. Williamson, hastily. She had heard Ward sing "Marching Through Georgia" before. His own mother said that any one who had heard him once, would never voluntarily permit him to sing it again.

Ward descended, grinning, and the handkerchief was again tied over Mrs. Williamson's eyes.

"Boy's or girl's?" she asked, as Polly held Artie's lucky-piece above her head.

"Boy's," said Polly.

"He must go to the pump and act 'The Old Oaken Bucket,'" directed Mrs. Williamson.

Artie marched over to the pump without a protest. He went through the motions of lowering and raising a bucket, pretended to jump as the imaginary cold water struck his feet, and when

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he had it nicely sitting on the well-curb, he sang noiselessly, with gestures that convulsed his audience.

"I wish we did have a well," he remarked, slipping his lucky-piece into his pocket.

"I'm glad we don't," declared his mother. "If we did, we'd have three boys, not buckets, hanging in the water half the time. A pump is safer."

"This belongs to a girl," said Polly, gravely, as she held her own handkerchief over Mrs. Williamson's head.

"She must play the violin for us," Mrs. Williamson decided.

Polly took a twig for a bow and the cover of a cracker box for her violin. She tucked her handkerchief over one end of the cover and played what she announced was "The Last Rose of Summer." When they applauded her, she insisted on giving an encore.

"I never had more fun in my life," said Dick Hare, when he said good-bye. "I don't wonder you have a good time in camp, for you seem to know how to amuse yourselves. I'll be on hand two weeks from Saturday without fail. You couldn't bribe me to miss another meeting."

"Do you know why he said that?" Polly asked, as the girls made ready for their swim.

"Said what?" demanded Margy, struggling with her cap.

"About having a good time in camp and being able to amuse ourselves," explained Polly. "I wouldn't be sure, but I think he meant the Conundrum Club. They're always going over to Lake Bassing, and Carrie Pepper buys ice-cream and candy at the drug store every day."

"Well, let her," said Jess, dancing out into the sunshine. "I don't know why any one wants to go to that pokey town of Lake Bassing, to have a good time. I like it here."

"So do I," said Margy, following her down to the water. "We'll have fun to-morrow, too. The folks are going to River Bend for the day and come back on the late afternoon boat with Daddy."

This was the plan—for the three mothers to spend the day in River Bend and come back at night, bringing the three fathers to spend Sunday in camp. Fred was to be in charge of Camp Riddle in their absence, and very proud he felt to be trusted.

CHAPTER XI

THE HERMIT

"Now what shall we do first?" Fred said the next morning when, after an early breakfast, the mothers had left to catch the morning boat.

"Let's go around the island," said Polly, suggesting her favorite pastime.

Margy seconded the suggestion and the others agreed. They had walked around the island several times, but the woods were always interesting and they liked the exercise.

"Some day," said Fred, as they neared the fenced space in the clearing, "I am going to build a lighthouse at this end of the island."

"What for?" asked Artie, curiously.

"Oh, I'll live in it and look out at the water, and when there's a wreck, I'll help pull it ashore," explained Fred.

"There are never any wrecks in Lake Bassing," Jess reminded him.

"Well, there might be," argued Fred.

"I wish we had a boat," said Artie for, pos-

sibly, the fiftieth time since he had landed in camp.

"You know perfectly well they won't let us have a boat," returned Ward, with good-nature.

They were leaning against the railing now and watching the surface of the lake dotted with small pleasure craft, motor boats and rowboats.

"There isn't any smoke coming from Triangle Island to-day," observed Jess.

"That shows some one was having a picnic, the day we saw the smoke," declared Polly.

They walked on, rounding the point and stopping next to help Jess hunt for four-leaf clovers. She was collecting them, and already had a dozen pressed in a book.

"Well, I don't know how you feel," said Fred, after half an hour of unsuccessful search, "but I could drink some lemonade."

"Will you make some when we get back, Polly?" asked Artie, eagerly.

"Of course. Mother got lemons yesterday," said Polly. "Wait a minute! Here's a clover, Jess."

Jess was quite willing to press on toward lemonade now that she had another clover, and they marched briskly down the slope that led to camp.

"Fred!" said Polly, in a low voice as they came in sight of the camp. "Fred, who's that?"

"Search me," said Fred, inelegantly. "I never saw him before."

A battered old rowboat was drawn close in to shore and in it sat a queer figure. He was an old man with a long white beard—that much they could see from where they stood. And he wore—of all things on a hot summer's day!—a red quilted dressing gown, faded and worn, to be sure, but still suggestive of blazing fireplaces and comfort on cold, frosty, winter nights.

"You go and talk to him, Fred," said Margy, pushing her brother forward. "Ask him what he wants."

Fred walked down to the beach and the others followed a little behind him. None of them was frightened, but they were curious.

"How are you, sir?" said the old man, who had been watching Fred with bright, dark eyes.

"All right, thank you," returned Fred, not quite certain how to answer. "Did you come—are you—is there anything you want to see?"

This was not exactly what Fred wanted to say, but the man's hat was distracting his attention. The others, too, were staring at it. In the first place, it was quite the largest straw hat any of them had ever seen—an enormous hat of faded yellow straw with a high, peaked crown. It was so broad that it extended beyond the

wearer's shoulders, and it was secured from blowing away in the breeze by a string that went around the crown and was wound tightly around one of the buttons of the dressing gown.

The old man's beard was as white as snow and so was the long hair that showed under his fantastic hat. His face was brown and wrinkled, his dark eyes brilliant. When he smiled, Fred involuntarily smiled, too. He certainly looked queer, but not unkempt or dirty, as a tramp might look.

"You know who I am, don't you?" said the old man, still smiling.

"Why, no—of course not," replied Fred.

"Oh, but you know my name! Think, and you'll tell me," said the old man. "Try now—think real hard."

Fred stared at him strangely. Was the old man coaxing him? And to tell his own name?

"Who are you?" said Fred, quickly. "Where did you come from?"

Their strange visitor looked past him to the five others—by this time a little frightened—huddled in a little group.

"That little girl there—the one with the dark curls—she knows me!" said the old man, pointing a finger at Jess. "Come now, what's my name?"

Jess tried to hide behind Polly.

"Make him stop," she said, in a scared whisper.

"Why, Jess Larue, how silly you are!" scolded Polly. "He's a poor old man and no one to be afraid of, I'm sure. I'm going to ask him if he doesn't want some good lemonade."

"Dare you to," said Ward.

Polly walked, without answering, down to the boat.

"If you've been rowing in the sun, you must be warm," she said clearly. "Don't you want to come and sit under one of our trees while I make some lemonade? It will be ready in a moment."

"Don't you know my name either?" asked the old man, in a disappointed tone.

Polly shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she said gently. "I'm sorry, but I don't know your name. I never saw you before. Will you wait for the lemonade?"

"Thank you, I'll be very glad to wait," the old man answered, straightening up and speaking as politely as any one. "But, if you don't mind, I'll sit here; I never get out of my boat, unless I have to."

Margy and Jess helped Polly with the lemonade, while the boys sat around the kitchen door and talked of their visitor. When her pitcher

was ready, Polly put a couple of sandwiches and a cruller on a plate and carried them down to the boat, together with the lemonade. The others trooped after her.

The old man was evidently thirsty and hungry, for he drank two glasses of the lemonade and ate the sandwiches, one after the other.

"I'll put the cruller in my pocket, if you don't mind," he said. "I'm much obliged for your—your hospitality. And you don't know who I am?"

They said "no" again, and he picked up his oars.

"If you do happen to remember, call me up, won't you?" he asked, pushing the boat off into the lake.

"But where do you live?" asked Polly hurriedly.

"Oh—there—the same old place," answered the old man, waving an oar carelessly over his shoulder. "Don't forget to call me up, if you remember."

The Riddle Club watched him row away in speechless amazement. He was not at all feeble, but rowed easily, with a strong stroke. They could see the sun shining on the red satin dressing gown after he was too far from the shore to be distinguished by his boat.

Margy was the first to speak.

"Well, for pity's sake!" she said.

Fred rolled over on the ground and laughed.

"Just call me up!" he mimicked. "Who does he think he is?"

"I'm so sorry for him," said Polly, soberly.

"How would you like to be old and queer, Fred Williamson, and have people laugh at you?"

"Yes, and his hat is a lot more sensible than getting your neck so sunburned you cry when Mother puts cream on it," said Jess, pointedly.

"I didn't cry," Ward contradicted her, flushing. "Anyway, the old duffer's hat will do for a boat when that one he has now falls to pieces in the lake."

"I guess he'd buy a better boat, if he had any money," said Margy.

"He drank enough lemonade," commented Artie. "I was counting on having enough for once in my life, and then he had to help himself."

"You're a selfish, mean boy, Artie Marley," his sister informed him. "I suppose you think a poor tired, thirsty old man ought to leave all the lemonade for you to drink! That old man needed something cool—you can always get something to eat."

They continued to argue about the old man at intervals for the rest of the day. From the

mail-carrier, who came at noon, they learned that their visitor was known through the region of Lake Bassing simply as The Hermit. Where he came from, no one knew. He lived on Triangle Island—had, indeed, taken possession of it, but as it was not convenient for camping parties, he was allowed to stay—and had built himself a rude shelter there. He spent his time rowing around the lake, asking every one he met who he was.

"He's perfectly harmless," said the carrier. "Wouldn't hurt a fly, as the saying goes. But he's lost his mind. He seems to be real polite, and when he comes to a store to do a little buying—I guess he lives mostly on crackers and cheese—you'd think he was a school teacher, to hear him talk. Too bad he ever got like that."

The three mothers returned that night. With them were Mr. Marley, Mr. Larue and Mr. Williamson. Before they were fairly seated at the supper table, they had to hear about the hermit.

"Hermit?" said Mr. Williamson, his eyes twinkling. "Hermit? Why, that's a little cake—like a cookie. Mother often bakes them."

"Oh, Daddy!" protested Margy. "This isn't a cake! This is a man! And he lives on Triangle Island."

The boys were inclined to laugh and tease the

girls about the strange old hermit, but to their surprise the older folk seemed interested and sympathetic. When Mr. Williamson took the boys rowing the next afternoon, he rowed around Triangle Island. But they saw no signs of the old man.

"Don't make fun of him—be kind," said Mr. Williamson, earnestly. "He may not be crazy. Plenty of people are odd who have very good minds. And if he is crazy, that's all the more reason why you should go out of your way to help him. You ought to be very sorry for him."

Monday morning came all too soon, but Mr. Larue said solemnly he was glad he could go back to a quiet house.

"If this riddle contest is coming off next Saturday night," he said, "I want time to study up on riddles. I'm rusty."

"Do you realize we've promised these youngsters to pay forfeits?" asked Mr. Marley. "They're likely to ruin us, when it comes to redeeming our treasure."

"Oh, there won't be any forfeits," said Mr. Williamson, gaily. "The way to nip that in the bud is to guess every riddle."

The assembled Riddle Club—they were standing on the wharf, waiting for the boat to push off—laughed. They knew all about riddles.

"We're going to take the rowboat back, Daddy," called Fred, as the whistle of the big steamboat blew. "You said we could."

"Be careful," said his father. "Remember to row slowly and don't take the girls—then you won't get to skylarking."

"We don't skylark," said Margy, indignantly.

"Well, you might rock the boat," declared Fred. "And, anyway, we have to keep our mind on our work; women always have to ask questions."

This made the girls so angry that they refused to stay and watch the three boys untie the big rowboat and push off.

This was disappointing. The boys felt exceedingly proud of themselves, for this was the first time they had been permitted in a boat without an older person with them. They did not want the girls in the boat, but they would have liked to see them lined up admiringly on shore.

CHAPTER XII

A RESCUE

"LET's go up and row around a couple of islands and then go down," said Artie.

"Well, I suppose we might as well," Fred agreed. "We'll be taking the boat back just the same."

"Isn't it my turn to row?" demanded Ward.

"Not yet," replied Fred, who was doing the rowing. "I'll let you know when you can have the oars."

They were really supposed to row directly across the lake to the boathouse where the boat had been hired, but the temptation to spend more time in the boat was too much for them.

"Can't you row any faster?" asked Artie. "Look how fast that boat is going, Fred."

"Well, I'm not an engine," responded Fred. "That's a motor boat, so it's no wonder she cuts through the water. All that man has to do is to steer."

"Oh," said Artie. "I wish we had a motor boat."

"I'd rather have a rowboat, like this," said Ward, mildly.

"Your father has all the boats he wants, I guess," replied Fred. "Some day you'll be running a steamboat, Ward; that is, if you don't get so fat you tip the boat up when you go on board."

"There's Triangle Island, fellows," said Ward, eager to change the subject. "And see, there's smoke curling up. The old hermit must be at home."

"Let's go see him," said Artie, instantly. "Row over, Fred, and we'll see what kind of a house he lives in. The mail-carrier said it was made out of old boards and barrels."

Nothing loth, Fred turned the boat so that it headed for Triangle Island. As he swung out into the middle of the channel between the shore and the island, something sharp and black bore down upon them, churning the water into white foam as it came.

"Look out!" shouted Ward. "Fred, look what you're doing! Here comes a motor boat!"

Fred glanced, not at the oncoming boat, but at Ward.

"*Sit down!*" he said grimly. "Sit down, I tell you!"

Artie bounced helplessly on the seat.

"It will cut us in half!" he cried. "It will go right through this boat—honest, Fred!"

Fred was rowing frantically, but he did not look toward the boat. He bent over the oars and pulled the longest, steadiest stroke he could.

"It won't run into us," he said confidently.

Nor did it. The swift, racing power boat that shot through the water with the effect of skimming it, passed behind them, instead of striking them. But it kicked up such a heavy "sea," if the lake waters could be called a sea, that the light rowboat was lifted up on one of the swells and tipped completely over!

Fred was the first to come up. He shook the water out of his eyes and looked around for the other two. He could swim fairly well, but Artie, he knew, was just learning and Ward was apt to lose his head when he found himself in water beyond his depth.

The overturned boat was bobbing on the water, the oars floating near by. A shout behind them made Fred turn. He saw Ward and Artie a little distance off, and, putting out from Triangle Island, the shabby old boat that belonged to the hermit. The old man was rowing, his white beard flying in the breeze.

"Catch hold of an oar!" commanded Fred,

swimming toward Ward and Artie. "That will hold you up! Look, Artie, there's an oar close to your hand."

Artie caught hold of the oar, but unfortunately he grasped it in such a way that it gave Ward a blow on the stomach. He promptly disappeared beneath the water again.

"I'll get him!" called the old hermit, who had reached the scene by this time. "I'll get him—don't you worry."

And, red dressing gown and all, he dived over the side of the boat. He was evidently a fine swimmer, for he appeared with Ward in his arms a few moments later.

"He's all right—only the breath is knocked out of him," said the old man. "You two hold the boat steady while I put him in."

Ward opened his eyes as he was put in the boat and smiled, a sickly grin, but still a smile.

"You two get in—I'll hold the boat," said the hermit, the tails of his dressing gown floating on the water. "There! Now I'll fasten your boat to mine and we'll be shipshape."

In spite of their uncomfortable state, the boys could not help but notice how rational the old man appeared. Except for his fantastic dress—the enormous straw hat lay on one of the seats

in his boat—he seemed like any one else. Certainly, he had acted with great common sense and quickness.

He tied their rowboat to his and then climbed in and took the oars.

“You have double oarlocks, I see—can’t I help row?” asked Fred, respectfully.

The hermit had been careful to put the oars that went with the hired rowboat in it, after he had righted it.

“You don’t think I need help, do you?” he asked, an odd figure in his dripping garments. “You may have to bail, before we get ashore, but I can do all the rowing that is needed.”

“Gee, he can row, can’t he?” whispered Artie, in admiration.

The old man was sending the boat through the water with strong, even strokes. There was none of the sudden jerks so noticeable when Fred rowed.

“He’s going toward Tom’s Island,” said Ward, beginning to feel better.

“We don’t want to go home. We have to take this boat back to Captain Denton,” said Fred, touching the old man timidly on the arm. “We hired it over the week end, and we were taking it back when the waves from the motor boat upset us.”

"I'll take it back for you—I know Captain Denton," said the old man, calmly. "You don't want to sit around in wet clothes, if it is warm weather."

Ward looked at Artie.

"But your clothes are wet, too," said Artie.

"Oh, I'm an old man. I'm used to living out in the rain and the dew," the old hermit replied dreamily. "Nothing hurts me."

The boys said no more, and he continued to row them toward their own island. In a few moments the keel scraped the shore and they tumbled out.

"Wait till we tell Mother," said Fred, quickly. "She'll make you some hot coffee, and maybe she has a dry coat you can wear."

They ran up the beach to the tent house, but though they were not gone three minutes, when they came back, the entire camp following them, they found the old hermit had not waited. He was rowing swiftly away, in the direction of the boathouse on the other side of the lake, and when they called, he waved with one hand, and continued on his course.

"Gee, Mother, he certainly was good to us!" said Fred.

"That red satin dressing gown is full of holes—did you notice it?" asked Artie, thoughtfully.

"Can't he swim!" said Ward, admiringly.

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"He held me with one arm and swam with the other. And strong! He turned that boat over without a bit of help from us."

The boys were hustled into dry clothing and forced to drink hot lemonade before they were allowed to tell their story. When they had explained how they happened to be in the water, Polly had it on the tip of her tongue to remark that perhaps if the girls had gone with them, they would have been more careful. But she thought better of it in time and was glad she did. You'll never be sorry for the unkind things you don't say—that's something to remember.

"Oh, I do wish he had let us do something for him," said Mrs. Williamson, when Fred had told them what had happened. "He's old to expose himself like that. He ought to have had something hot to drink and dry clothes."

"He may be strong and hardy," mused Mrs. Marley, "but certainly he'll be exhausted to-night, after such an experience. I hate to think of him living there all alone on that island. Suppose he were to be sick?"

"Dick Hare is coming to the campfire to-night," said Mrs. Larue. "Perhaps we can get him to take some things to Triangle Island. There's no use talking, we must do something for that old man; he saved the boys from drowning, for they

would hardly have been able to get back in the boat without help."

But when Dick Hare came that night, he said the hermit was as proud as he was queer.

"He won't take a thing," the young man declared. "He won't even let me give him a ride when I meet him on the road. He's getting queerer by the minute, too. Called up the drug store the other day, when he was in town, and asked them if they knew who he was."

"I never liked him much before," confessed Fred. "But to-day he was a wonder. You ought to have seen him pull Ward out of the water and lift Artie in, when he couldn't make the boat. And he never said one crazy thing, did he, Artie?"

"No, he didn't," replied Artie. "I kept waiting to hear him say, 'Don't you know who I am?' But he never said it once."

"I think we ought to ask him to come to a camp-fire," said Polly, suddenly. "He must be lonely on his island, and he'd like to hear us sing and help toast marshmallows, I know he would."

Dick Hare held out a beautifully browned marshmallow to her, smiling.

"Why not ask him to attend a session of the Riddle Club?" he asked, teasingly.

To his surprise, Polly took the challenge seriously.

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"I will," she said. "The first chance I get. He might know some riddles we never heard."

Fred was beginning to say something, when Ward interrupted.

"Look who's here!" said he, falling upon Artie and rolling over on the ground with him, as they always did when their feelings were too much to be put into words.

"Why, Carrie Pepper!" Mrs. Marley rose and went to meet the visitor, while the others stared in helpless surprise.

"Where did you come from?" asked Mrs. Marley. "Where are the others?"

"Back in camp," replied Carrie, taking her place in the circle around the fire as though she were one of them.

"But you didn't walk over that dark road alone, did you?" inquired Mrs. Williamson, quickly. "Why didn't one of the boys bring you over?"

"Well, you see, we're all mad at each other," Carrie explained coolly. "No one is speaking to any one else. I just thought I'd give them something to think about, so I came over here."

"Fred and Ward and Artie will walk back with you," said Mrs. Williamson, firmly. "If your mother doesn't know you are here, Carrie, you mustn't stay and worry her."

"Oh, say, I like it here," declared Carrie. "We

never have a good fire in our camp; something is the matter with the fireplace and it won't draw. Anyway, Mrs. Williamson, before I go back, I want to ask the Riddle Club to come over tomorrow afternoon. We can have a riddle contest. That will be fun."

Polly was utterly unable to resist a contest of any kind. Her eyes began to dance, and Margy and Jess looked delighted, too.

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNCOMFORTABLE CONTEST

"WHAT time will you be over?" asked Carrie. That was so like her. She assumed that the Riddle Club would come, of course.

"Mother, it will be all right, won't it?" said Polly. "I think it will be fine to have a contest before Saturday, because we may learn some new riddles to try out then."

"I suppose if you want to match riddles with Carrie's club, to-morrow will be a very good time," replied Mrs. Marley, looking at Artie so pointedly that he scrambled to his feet.

"The boys are waiting to walk back with you, Carrie," announced Mrs. Larue, as a hint to Ward and Fred. "We don't want to seem inhospitable, but we can't have your mother worried about you."

"Well, I'll go back in just a minute," said Carrie, lingering. "What time will you be over?" she added to Polly.

"Two or half-past," answered Polly. "Take a marshmallow with you, Carrie."

The boys were not at all pleased to have to leave their fire and trudge the half mile to the next bridge. So when Dick Hare rose and announced that he would go with them—he lived in a farmhouse a short distance beyond—they welcomed him joyfully.

"What did Polly mean about next Saturday night?" asked Carrie, as they walked down the road.

"We're going to ask the older folks—Mother and Dad and Mr. and Mrs. Larue and the rest—riddles," explained Fred. "And if they can't guess, they're going to pay a forfeit."

"Don't forget, I'm going to be there," said Dick Hare.

"Mercy, I shouldn't think grown-up people would like riddles," said Carrie, disdainfully.

"Well, they do," Artie informed her. "Mother likes riddles as much as we do."

"Yes, and my mother can guess all kinds," boasted Ward.

Carrie said, "how queer," and by this time they were in sight of the bridge that led to Dick's Island.

"Don't forget, to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock," Carrie called, as she turned in at the bridge. "We'll have lots of fun."

The next afternoon, the Riddle Club started off

to visit Camp Conundrum. They had "practiced" on each other all during the morning, and they felt that they were reasonably well supplied with riddles to ask. Ward had his famous one he had asked at the first session of the Riddle Club in camp—the riddle he had asked and been unable to give the answer. The answer was now safely tucked away in his mind.

"Whatever you do," were President Polly's final instructions, "don't scrap. You know you and Joe Anderson hardly ever agree, Fred."

"Oh, we argue now and then, but that doesn't mean anything," returned Fred, carelessly. "Joe Anderson isn't so bad."

They were a little surprised when they reached the camp, to have no one come to greet them. The buildings looked deserted, but they could hear some one moving about in the kitchen.

"That must be Pauline," said Polly. "Where do you suppose they have all gone? We'd better go and ask her."

Pauline heard their voices and came to the door.

"Hello!" she cried, smiling when she saw them. "Are you looking for Carrie and the rest of them? They're down on the beach."

The beach was behind the buildings and could not be seen when one entered the camp from the bridge.

"Are you sure she said two o'clock, Fred?" asked Margy, anxiously. "Perhaps they didn't expect us so early."

"She said two o'clock, all right," replied Fred, grimly.

"Yes, she said it twice," reported Artie.

They went around behind the dining-room, or mess-house, and found the members of the Co-nundrum Club on the beach, as Pauline had said. They were in their bathing suits and seated comfortably on a side of the small landing built out over the water. Their feet dangled in the lake and they were apparently having a very good time.

"It was so hot, we thought we wouldn't dress up," said Carrie.

Polly looked vexed. She had not "dressed up," either—she and Margy and Jess were in their khaki suits—but they had walked through the hot sun and now were evidently expected to sit on the hot beach while their hosts enjoyed their comfortable attire.

"We could have worn our bathing suits and waded over," thought Polly, resentfully. "I think she might have said something."

However, Margy was pouting and Jess frowning, so Polly decided that the best thing to do was to act as though everything that might happen had been expected. She determined not to complain.

"We're going to pay forfeits, too," said Joe Anderson. "If you can't guess a riddle, you have to do whatever the person who asked you that riddle says. No matter what he asks."

"You seem to have everything thought out," said Fred, rather sarcastically.

"Oh, we have—we use our minds," retorted Joe.

"Well, let's start," suggested Polly, hastily. "Shall we count to see which side asks the first riddle?"

"You take these slips," directed Carrie. "We each have a number. And you pair off with us, according to the numbers."

It did look as though the Conundrum Club had done rather more than its share of planning, but Polly thought it would seem foolish to flare up and go home.

"We can stick it out this once," she thought swiftly. "But never, never will I come to this camp for another contest!"

Carrie had six slips of paper in an old box and she held this while the members of the Riddle Club each drew one. It developed that Polly was paired with Albert Holmes, Margy with Stella Dorman, Fred with Joe Anderson, Jess with Carrie, Ward with Ben Asher and Artie with Winifred Sims.

"Now you can ask the first riddle, if you want to, Polly," said Carrie, graciously.

Polly looked critically at Albert Holmes. He was a good-natured boy, not particularly quick-witted.

"When can a man have something in his pocket even when it is empty?" she asked him.

Albert threw a stone into the lake and watched the widening ripples.

"Never," he said, with conviction. "If a pocket's empty, it's empty, and that's all there is to it."

"Do you give up?" asked Polly.

"Sure! Is there a catch in it?" he said suspiciously.

"An empty pocket can have a hole in it," replied Polly, merrily.

A slow grin dawned in Albert's face.

"That's so," he conceded. "You got me that time, Polly. What do you want me to do as a forfeit?"

Polly considered. Margy, mopping her face with her handkerchief—the sun flooded the beach in the afternoon—sent her a silent message, which Polly rightly interpreted.

"You go and put your regular suit on," directed Polly, calmly.

Albert flushed, opened his mouth to speak, and

then thought better of it. He was sport enough to go at once.

"Now it's our side's turn," said Carrie, who was frowning. "I'll ask you a riddle, Jess."

"Go ahead," Jess said shortly.

"Why is the letter 'A' like twelve o'clock?" asked Carrie.

Jess fanned herself with a folded newspaper that happened to be close at hand. Her dark hair, wet with perspiration, was curling tightly in little rings around her face. She looked pretty and mischievous.

"Because it's in the middle of 'day,'" she answered calmly.

Carrie nearly fell into the water, but Winifred Sims grasped her in time.

"Did you know that one?" demanded Carrie. "Did you?"

"Of course," said Jess, in a tone which implied that her knowledge of riddles was extensive. "Of course I did. That's one of my oldest ones!"

"Huh! think you're smart, don't you?" replied Carrie, rudely. "Well, you ask me your riddle right now. I bet you anything, Jess Larue, that I can answer any riddle you can think of."

"All right, if the others are willing," agreed Jess, with unwonted meekness. "Why is an orange like a church steeple, Carrie?"

"An orange is round and a steeple is pointed. Is that it? No, that's why they're different," said Carrie, answering her own question. "Oh, I don't know. What is the answer, Jess?" she asked airily, just as if she had never said she could answer any riddle Jess could put.

"Because we have a peal from it."

"Huh, that's not so much of a riddle!"

"Forfeit, Carrie!" chorused her friends. "Pay a forfeit!"

Jess glanced at Polly sitting patiently in the sun and at Albert, who had come back, dressed in his usual camping clothes.

"You put on your khaki suit, Carrie," said Jess, reasonably.

"I don't want to—it's hot," objected Carrie. "I'm comfortable this way. Tell me something else to do."

"That's the forfeit," said Fred, sternly. "Are you going to play fair or aren't you?"

"Oh, I'll go—some girls are too mean for words!" grumbled Carrie, slowly moving off.

It was now the Conundrum Club's turn to ask, and Stella Dorman was selected.

"What word of eight letters is there, from which you can subtract five and leave ten?" Stella asked triumphantly of Margy, who was her partner.

"Oh, my goodness," cried Margy, unhappily. "I never could do arithmetic in school, and how do you expect me to do an arithmetic riddle? I give it up—I couldn't guess it, if I tried a week."

"Tendency!" almost shouted Stella. "You drop the last five letters and you have T-E-N left."

"Have you?" asked Margy, who was not noticeably strong in spelling. "All right—what shall I do for a forfeit?"

"Let me see," said Stella. "You might go up and ask Pauline for something to eat. I'm almost starved."

"Perhaps Mrs. Pepper wouldn't like it," hesitated Margy.

"She isn't at home—nobody's at home," said Stella. "That's why we asked you over, so we can make all the noise we want to."

The Riddle Club felt more uncomfortable than ever, to find that they had been asked without Mrs. Pepper's or Mrs. Helms' knowledge. However, there was nothing to do now but "stick it out," to quote Polly.

"I'll go and ask Pauline," said Margy, "but I don't believe she'll like it."

While she was gone Ward turned to dark-eyed Ben Asher.

"Ben, see if you can guess this one," he said: "What is the strongest day in the week?"

"Huh, why don't you ask something harder?" complained Ben. "I know that one. The answer is Sunday. All the rest are week days."

Ward was chagrined. He had decided not to ask his pet "hard" riddle, because he wanted to keep the answer a secret. He was afraid some of the others might ask it Saturday night, and he wished to try it out on the older folk himself. And now, lo and behold, Ben had guessed his easy riddle without half trying.

"All right—you don't have to pay a forfeit," he said sadly. "You're lucky, Ben."

Here Artie decided that he could wait no longer, so he put his riddle to Winifred Sims.

"What have feet but walk not?" as asked, with his sunny smile.

"I know perfectly well," said Winifred. "I know the exact right answer, but I just can't think of it."

CHAPTER XIV

FORFEITS AND A PRIZE

ARTIE waited patiently for Winifred to think. Carrie came back, dressed in a gingham frock, and Margy returned from the kitchen, carrying a plate of sugar cookies. Still Winifred did not think of the answer.

"Well, I guess I'll have to give up," she said finally. "What have feet and walk not, Artie?"

"Stoves," said Artie, placidly.

"Oh——" Winifred looked provoked. "It's because you said 'walk not' instead of 'don't walk,' " she complained. "I think you ought to speak plain English."

"For a forfeit," said Artie, wholly without malice, "you have to get dressed, the same as Carrie."

"I suppose you think you're smart!" flared Winifred, while Fred whispered to Polly that Artie's English was plain enough to please any one.

"Now it's my turn," crowed Joe Anderson, as Winifred, muttering, went off to dress.

Joe Anderson and Fred, as Polly had remarked, were not especially congenial friends. They seemed to possess the faculty of irritating each other. In school they were usually on opposite sides of any contest and rivals in any race.

"See if you can get this," said Joe, lazily: "What tree is of the greatest importance in history?"

Fred glanced at him cautiously.

"How many chances?" he asked.

"One," answered Joe. "One, and no more."

Fred thought furiously for a moment.

"I guess it's the oak," he said. "You always hear about the Charter Oak."

"You missed it," triumphed Joe. "The answer is 'the date.'"

A wave of vexation made Fred's face flush. He was angry to have failed on such a comparatively simple riddle.

"Now about the forfeit," said Joe, deliberately. "Let me think—— Oh, I know! You have to pump four pails of water."

This was mean of Joe, for it was the job allotted to the three boys. They were supposed to pump the water twice a day, two pails in the morning and two in the afternoon. To-day they had

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not pumped at all, and Pauline had threatened to tell Mrs. Pepper and Mrs. Helms when they returned to camp.

"Where are the pails?" asked Fred, quietly.

He had a shrewd idea that he was doing some one else's work, but he made up his mind not to complain—"grunt," as he expressed it. He set to work at the pump and the riddle contest went on.

It was Albert Holmes' turn to ask Polly, and he had a riddle on the tip of his tongue.

"Which travels faster, Polly," asked Albert, "heat or cold?"

Polly smiled airily.

"Heat does," she said. "Because you can easily catch cold, Albert. That was an easy one."

Albert was downcast at her quick reply.

"Ask some harder ones," urged Ward.

"I've got a hard one for you," said Ben Asher. "Bet you can't guess this! What bus found room for the greatest number of people in this world?"

"Gee! that is hard," admitted Ward. "Just one guess, Ben?"

"Just one," replied Ben.

"The omnibus?" ventured Ward.

"Wrong," said Ben. "Dead wrong! Columbus, little boy, found room for the greatest number of people in this world."

"Did he?" asked Ward, a trifle dazed. "Oh, I see—he discovered America."

"Well, I'm glad you see through the answer," said Ben, "because then you'll feel more like paying the forfeit perhaps. Fan me till I tell you to stop."

Ward took up the newspaper Margy had put down and patiently began to fan Ben. Margy was now ready for Stella.

"Why is the root of a tongue like a disconsolate boy?" asked Margy.

"I don't think it's fair to ask that kind of riddle," objected Stella. "No one can guess them, ever! You have to know the answer!"

"Well, that's the riddle I asked you," said Margy, obstinately. "Can you guess it?"

"No, I can't," replied Stella. "I won't even try. What's the forfeit?"

"You have to put on your khaki suit," pronounced Margy, trying not to laugh.

Stella flounced away, and Winifred Sims, who had joined the circle in a plaid skirt and middy blouse, informed Artie that it was his turn to be quizzed. Fred, warm and silent, came back from pumping the water and waited. It would be his turn to ask Joe Anderson a riddle when Winifred had finished.

"Artie, tell me this," said Winifred, sure that

she could baffle Artie easily: "When does a boy cease to be a boy?"

"My daddy told me that one," chuckled Artie. "The answer is, 'When he turns into an alley-way.'"

"That's right," admitted Winifred. "Well, you don't have to pay a forfeit."

"Now, Joe," said Fred, grimly. "Answer this: What is the difference between a blind man and a sailor in prison?"

"Both are shut away from the world, I suppose," answered Joe.

"That isn't the answer," said Fred.

"Well, that wasn't a real guess," declared Joe, hastily. "What I meant to say was that neither can see to navigate."

"You lose," replied Fred. "The answer is: 'One cannot see to go and the other cannot go to sea.'"

"Now he has to pay a forfeit," remarked Artie, with satisfaction.

"All right, I have one for him," said Fred. "Joe, you're in your bathing suit—wash the dog. He needs a bath."

Joe looked alarmed.

"He won't let me," he stammered. "He's an awful cross dog! He is a watch dog, and you have to leave him alone."

"You have to wash him," said Fred, sternly. "Take him into the water and don't forget the soap. He may be cross because he hasn't had a bath for so long."

Joe sputtered a few minutes longer, but in the end he got a bar of laundry soap from Pauline and dragged the dog down to the water's edge. By dint of coaxing and threatening, he got the animal into the water and thoroughly wet. But when he attempted to rub soap on him, he unfortunately let some get in the poor beast's eye.

"Woof! woof!" growled the captive, and with one push of his large body he knocked Joe flat and swam for the shore.

Safe on the beach he shook himself, sending showers of drops over the audience, who promptly scattered. Joe, stumbling to his feet and clearing his eyes of water, started for the shore. But the dog refused to let him land.

He rushed up and down, barking, and even ran into the water, growling and showing his teeth, when Joe tried to step on the beach.

"Call him off," begged Joe.

"You haven't washed him," Fred retorted.

"I did, too," said Joe. "I can't stay in this water all the afternoon. Mrs. Pepper will be back and she wanted some stuff from the farm. I have to get dressed."

"Sorry, but we have to go, too," replied Fred. "I guess the contest is over, isn't it, Polly? We won it, three to one."

Polly touched Fred's sleeve quietly.

"Don't be mean," she said. "Make the dog let him come out."

"I don't know that I can," Fred answered; "but I suppose I can try."

He went back to the kitchen and coaxed a bone from Pauline. Then, approaching the dog, who refused to take his eyes off Joe, Fred waved the bone invitingly under his nose. The dog wavered a moment, sniffed hungrily, then followed Fred, who led him around behind the kitchen tent and gave him the bone to enjoy in peace.

"You have to have a knack with animals," he said slyly, as the Riddle Club retreated.

The shouts of laughter with which they greeted this sally drew forth parting shots of "silly dubs!" from the hosts of the afternoon, but the Riddle Club enjoyed the joke none the less.

Mrs. Marley and the other two mothers had little to say about the contest when they heard of the afternoon. They said quietly that unless the two clubs could meet in a spirit of good-natured fun and friendly rivalry, it would be better not to meet at all.

"Anyway, I don't think you had better go over

to Camp Conundrum very soon again," declared Mrs. Larue. "You'll find plenty to amuse you here in your own camp."

Saturday, of course, brought the three fathers, and that night, Dick Hare, for the extra riddle contest.

As soon as supper was over, the campfire was lit and they all gathered around. The nights were pleasantly cool on the island, and as soon as the sun went down a fire was grateful.

"We each have a riddle to ask," announced Polly, who, as president of the Riddle Club, had been chosen to act as spokesman. "And we have three answers to Mother's riddle, too. Not all of us could guess it."

"Suppose you read the answers first," suggested Mrs. Marley.

"I've forgotten what the riddle was," said Dick Hare. "I've been so busy I couldn't work on it and it slipped my mind."

"I'll read it," said Polly, obligingly. "What is that which comes with an automobile, is of no use to the automobile and yet the automobile cannot move without it?"

"Now read the answers," said Mr. Larue, his eyes twinkling.

Polly had three little folded slips of paper in her hand. She opened the first one.

"A knock," she read, looking puzzled.

The four men laughed so much that Fred betrayed himself.

"Well, a knock does come in an automobile, lots of times," he protested.

"And it isn't any use to a car, that's certain," said his father. "But, Fred, I have known automobiles to move without it, haven't you?"

"Well—yes," replied Fred, slowly.

Polly opened the second slip of paper.

"Upholstery," she read. "Why, how funny, Margy!" she added.

Margy blushed. "That's all I could think of," she apologized. "I knew it wasn't right."

The third paper had a single word written on it like the rest.

"Noise," Ward had written.

"You win!" said Mrs. Marley, her eyes sparkling. "Arthur, did you bring the prize with you?"

CHAPTER XV

HARD NUTS TO CRACK

FOR a moment, Ward was too surprised to speak. Then he recovered.

"That was just a joke," he said apologetically. "I wrote it down for fun."

"But that is the answer to the riddle, Ward," Mrs. Marley explained. "That is the only answer—'noise.' So you have won the prize."

"Gee!" said Ward, "what do you know about that?"

"Here you are, Ward," announced Mr. Marley, handing the boy a small, white box. "Jokes turn out well sometimes, you see."

Ward opened the box. There was a small bronze compass—just the kind he had wanted so long. He could hardly say "thank you" to Mrs. Marley, but his shining eyes spoke for him.

"Now we ask you riddles," proclaimed Polly, joyously. "Ward was the prize winner, so he may begin."

Ward had his famous "hard" riddle all ready to try on his mother.

"Mother," he said seriously, "What is the difference between a barber and a sculptor?"

"Oh, my goodness, you don't expect me to guess that, do you?" cried Mrs. Larue, in dismay. "I haven't the slightest idea! Any forfeit would be cheap to pay for the answer."

"Then I'll tell you," said the obliging Ward. "The one curls up and dyes—that's the barber; and the other makes faces and busts—that's the sculptor. You needn't feel bad, Mother, because hardly any one would ever guess that unless they knew the answer in the first place."

"Forfeit!" called Mr. Larue. "Forfeit, Mother!"

"Your shiny ring," said Ward. "The sparkling one, Mother."

"What will redeem it?" hesitated Mrs. Larue. "I'd rather not take it off, dear. You might lose it."

"There was a piece of chocolate cake left from supper—could I have that?" asked Ward, whose sweet tooth was seldom satisfied.

"All right, eat it," said his mother, "if you can so soon after supper. I don't know what you are made of, Ward."

"Now, Jess, ask your father," directed Polly, having decided that the children should ask their own parents the riddles.

"This isn't so hard, Daddy," said Jess, encouragingly. "Perhaps you can guess it. What is that which lives in winter, dies in summer, and grows with its root upward?"

"Now you'll have to give me a little time with that," declared Mr. Larue, taking an old envelope out of his pocket and pretending to figure on the back. "Let me think—lives in winter—dies in summer——"

Every one waited in perfect silence.

"It isn't an icicle, is it?" asked Mr. Larue, looking up.

"It is, it is!" cried Jess, delighted that her father had guessed the answer. "It is an icicle, Daddy!"

"Then he doesn't have to pay a forfeit!" Ward's tone was so dejected that they all laughed.

"Never mind—maybe Mr. Williamson will," said Polly, smiling. "Fred, you ask your father a good, hard riddle."

Fred was quite willing.

"Why is a young lady dependent upon the letter Y, Dad?" he rattled off.

"I didn't know she was," said Mr. Williamson, smiling. "Is it because a young lady asks 'why' so often, Fred?"

"No, that isn't right," replied Fred. "One more guess, Dad."

"Then, perhaps, it is because she can't say 'yes' without it," said Mr. Williamson.

The grown-ups laughed at this, but Fred thought it rather a silly answer.

"That isn't the right answer," he said. "The right one is that without it she would be a young lad."

"Oh!" said Mr. Williamson. "I see. Very good, Fred. And what shall I pay as a forfeit?"

"I don't want anything you have to redeem," explained Fred. "But I wish you'd get up at five o'clock to-morrow morning and walk around the island with me."

"Sunday morning!" groaned his father. "Well, I'll think about it, Fred."

Margy was ready to test her mother's guessing powers now.

"Why should chairs never be covered with silk, Mother?" asked Margy.

"Because, Lamb, they are meant to be sat-in," answered Mrs. Williamson, merrily.

"Did you know that one?" asked Margy, disappointedly.

"I did indeed, dear," her mother replied. "Never mind, Margy, you might not ask me a riddle I could answer again in ten years."

Artie had stipulated that he be allowed to ask

his mother a riddle, and he was waiting impatiently for his turn.

"What is the most dangerous vegetable to have on a ship, Mother?" he asked confidently.

"Dangerous vegetable?" Mrs. Marley mused. "Well, let me think. Beet—radish—potatoes—no—leek! That's it, Artie—a leek!"

"I didn't think you'd know what a leek was," said the disappointed Artie. "I didn't. Fred said they are like onions, but I never saw any."

"Don't you care, Artie, Mother just guessed it by chance," Mrs. Marley told him, pulling him into her lap. "We'll listen to Polly ask Dad a hard one now."

Artie considered himself much too old to sit in his mother's lap, but he thought he might please her till Polly had asked her riddle.

"Daddy," said Polly, her eyes twinkling, "Who are the wickedest people in the world, and why?"

"Whew! Where do you youngsters get all these hard nuts?" asked Mr. Marley. "The wickedest people in the world, is it? You don't mean cannibals, do you, Polly?"

Polly shook her head, smiling.

"And you don't mean thieves who steal radio sets, do you?" ventured Mr. Marley, the answer apparently suggested to him by the radio aerials above his head.

"You can have but two guesses, and you've missed them both," Polly informed him. "The pen makers are the wickedest, Daddy. They make people steel pens and tell them they do write."

"Fine, Polly!" applauded Mr. Larue. "That's the best riddle I've heard in an age. Make your dad pay a good forfeit, sure."

"For a forfeit, Daddy," said Polly, "I think you ought to row us around the island in the dark. That would be fun!"

"Oh, Polly! Daddy's tired," expostulated Mrs. Marley.

"I'll think about it," said Mr. Marley, just as Mr. Williamson had done.

"I have an announcement to make," declared Dick Hare, hastily, as the entire Riddle Club made ready to focus attention on him. "Please don't ask me a riddle—I couldn't guess the simplest one, I'm afraid. But I should like to offer a special prize for a pretty difficult conundrum I clipped from a paper when I was a boy. I won't set a time limit for the answers. Instead I'll say that the prize is to be awarded to the one who first gives me the correct answer. The prize to be a secret till the answer is turned in."

"That will be fun," nodded Polly. "What is the riddle?"

"This is it," said Dick Hare, taking a yellow slip of paper from his wallet: "My first syllable is company, my second syllable shuns company, my third syllable calls company together, and my whole amuses company. What am I?"

Mr. Larue wrote down this riddle and promised copies to each of the children.

"That ought to keep you busy the rest of the summer," commented Mr. Marley. "Now about my forfeit: Strange to say, I don't feel like rowing six strong and healthy children around this island on a warm summer night. And one of them is a pretty fat boy, too," he added significantly.

"I'm not so fat," protested Ward.

"Well, anyway you put it, the idea does not appeal to me," said Mr. Marley. "Perhaps you'll be willing to let me off—and Mr. Williamson, too. He isn't fond of rising at five o'clock Sunday morning, the one chance he has to sleep a little late."

"What would you like to do for your forfeit?" asked Polly.

"I'd be willing to treat you all to ice-cream and anything else you like that they have in town, if you'll excuse Mr. Williamson and me from doing stunts," said Mr. Marley. "Dick has his machine here and he'll take you over. It is early

and won't be your bedtime for an hour yet, since you're allowed to stay up a little later in summer. How about that?"

The Riddle Club showed its approval by jumping up and doing a gay war dance around the fire.

"Come on, Dick!" cried Fred. "Hurry! The drug store might sell all the ice-cream before we get there; they have a crowd on Saturday night."

But, when they reached the town, there was plenty of ice-cream left for them all. Mr. Marley had given Fred a sum of money, and there was enough for "double decker" plates of ice-cream and for candy to take back to camp for each. Being two miles from a candy counter had been a good thing for some of them—Ward and Margy especially, who were famous for their appetite for sweets. Now, when they did get to Lake Bassing and bought candy, or the fathers brought them down a box on Saturday night, they made it "last longer" by eating fewer pieces at a time.

Sunday always passed very quickly in camp, and the day was divided into what Fred called "two sections." The older folk were to have the morning to themselves that they might sleep late or read or rest—in fact, do as they pleased without interference from the children, who were supposed

to amuse themselves. In the afternoon they had a Sunday School lesson and then every one went for a long walk—over the bridge and down the road into the country, or else around the island, Polly's favorite walk. They walked as slowly as they pleased, stopped often, and the children might ask as many questions as they wished. When they came home at dusk, the fire outdoors was lighted and supper cooked over the blazing embers. No wonder they "loved" Sunday and thought Monday morning came all too soon.

This week-end, after the three daddies went back to River Bend early Monday morning, Dick Hare and his bus, which had taken them to the steamboat landing, came back to get Mrs. Marley and Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Williamson. There was to be an all-day sewing meeting at a cross-roads village for a family whose house had burned to the ground. The father and mother and seven small children had nothing to wear, and the kind neighbors had planned to gather together and sew for them. Many of the summer campers and boarders about the lake had heard of the misfortune and had offered to help sew.

"Now be good children," said each of the three mothers, as she said good-bye. "Eat your lunch at the proper time and be careful when you go in bathing."

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"What'll we do?" asked Artie, as soon as the bus was out of sight.

"Walk around the island," suggested Polly.

"We did that yesterday," said Margy. "I don't call that very exciting."

"If you want something exciting, let's go over and see Camp Conundrum," Fred said mischievously. "They can probably start something."

"You mustn't quarrel with Joe Anderson," scolded Jess. "I say, let's go around the island."

"We can play," said Artie, his eyes beginning to shine. "We'll be shipwrecked sailors, with our—our possessions on our backs."

The children sometimes laughed at Artie's plays, but they really liked to work them out, too. This time Fred laughed knowingly.

"I suppose you saved a gun when you were wrecked, Artie?" he suggested.

Artie nodded. His gun was still dear to his heart, though dreadfully in the way. There seemed to be no place for it in the whole camp.

CHAPTER XVI

ARTIE'S MISHAP

"Now we're all ready," said Artie, blissfully, when he had his gun over his shoulder. "Come on."

"Well, don't you suppose we want some possessions, too?" Polly demanded. "Let's see—what shall I carry?"

"Some water, in a bottle," Ward suggested. "Remember how thirsty we were yesterday?"

"All right, I'll carry a bottle of water," agreed Polly, cheerfully.

Margy insisted on carrying the old fieldglasses—principally because she liked to have them swinging from her shoulder. Ward took an old tin pan to serve as a drum and Jess borrowed the largest wooden spoon from the kitchen because, as she said, she always wanted to dig in the woods and never had anything to dig with.

"I'm going to ride the bicycle, so I won't have to carry anything," Fred announced.

"You can't ride that wheel all around the

island," said Polly, surprised. "Why, Fred, some places the sand is almost up to our ankles—you know it is."

"Well, then I can get off and push it," said Fred. "Anyway, I'm going to ride it. What's the use of having a wheel if you never get any good from it?"

Fred had managed, with much patience and a good deal of steady work, to patch his bicycle up so that it was in running order. At least, it was thought to be in running order. He had not yet ridden it to town, but he had given demonstrations in camp and was satisfied that he had repaired the wheel.

The wrecked sailors started gayly forth, and so beautiful was the morning and so high their spirits—in spite of their supposed misfortunes—that they sang and whistled to the accompaniment Ward beat on the tin pan. It was lucky, as Polly observed, that they were on an island.

"It's the first time in my life that I could make all the noise I wanted to without some one saying 'hush,'" declared Jess, unexpectedly. "So I'm going to make all the noise I want to and as long as I want to."

"Bang! Bang!" pounded Ward, enthusiastically, on his pan.

A passing motor boat, filled with a picnic party,

fluttered gay handkerchiefs toward them and they waved back.

"Why don't we wade?" suggested Margy. "We could go round the island in the water! That would be fun! We've never done that."

"Don't you know it's too deep?" demanded her brother. "They say the deepest part of the lake is up at the head of the bluff. We never could wade around there."

"Well, I never thought of that," apologized Margy.

They were in the heavy sand by this time and Fred dismounted from the wheel.

"Say, I think you dropped something," drawled Jess, pointing to a small cog wheel that lay in the sand.

"Gee, that does belong to this, doesn't it?" said Fred. "I wonder where it came from?"

He stopped and put the cog in his pocket, and then caught up with the others.

"Your front wheel wobbles," said Ward, critically.

"No wonder—it's coming off," giggled Artie.

Fred felt of the wheel gingerly, and it gently toppled over in his hands.

"I'll carry it for you," offered Ward, generously.

Fred was now burdened with the frame of the

bicycle, and even that seemed bewitched. It came apart, rapidly and consistently, and the others were kept busy picking up the small parts as they fell in the sand.

"It's like that doll I had when I was little," panted Jess, beginning the climb that led to the bluff. "She was strung on one piece of elastic and when she lost one arm she just came apart. I felt like a cannibal, picking up arms and legs all over the house."

"Cannibals eat people," Artie corrected. "You didn't eat your doll, did you, Jess?"

"Oh, of course not—you know what I mean!" said Jess, impatiently. "How silly you are, Artie!"

Artie merely smiled sweetly and stuck his gun in the ground to serve as a spike. He often found it useful to him as a stake. Now he pulled himself up the slope with its aid.

The cool shade of the woods was grateful after their climb, and the children headed straight for the bluff and the fenced space. This had never lost its fascination for them, and they had named it Lookout Point.

"The old hermit must be at home to-day, because I see smoke," Fred announced.

"I'd hate to live there all alone," said Ward.

"You'd better come away from that old fence,"

cautioned Polly. "I don't believe it is safe."

"You always say that," complained Margy. "What's the matter with it?"

"It's old," said Polly. "And goodness knows when any one has mended it. Artie, you make me nervous, leaning on it like that."

Five of the six members of the Riddle Club were hanging over the fence, studying the lake spread out before them. A thin curl of smoke from Triangle Island indicated that the hermit was in his shack.

"If we were really shipwrecked sailors," said Artie, dreamily, "we'd build a fire on this point and folks would see our signal and come and rescue us."

"Well, we promised not to build a fire," retorted the practical Jess.

"Oh, I was just pretending, of course," said Artie, putting his beloved gun down on the ground beside him. "I would like to be a sailor," he continued, his blue eyes staring at a gay little white sailboat anchored near the shore.

"I'm so thirsty, I could drink salt water!" declared Ward. "Polly, you didn't drop the bottle, did you?"

Polly shook her head. She held it out to him, smiling.

"It's pretty hot," she said. "I don't believe

you'll like it, Ward. Why don't you wait till we get home?"

"Because I'm thirsty now," replied Ward, reasonably. "Anybody want a drink first?"

Artie remained leaning on the fence, but the others turned and came toward Ward, whose eager look turned to one of vexation as he saw the bottle Polly handed him.

"Who pounded in the cork like that?" he demanded. "How can we get it out? You might think it was the ink bottle!"

In Ward's experience, one pounded in the corks of ink bottles very tightly, when it was planned to take the ink on a journey. But, surely, there was no reason why a bottle of water—"plain water," Ward said—should be so guarded.

"I'll try, but if it breaks my knife, you'll have to get it mended," said Fred. "Put the bottle down on the ground."

Fred knelt down to work at the cork and the others drew close in a circle. What happened next came so quickly that no one was ever able to describe it fully.

There was the sound of cracking wood, a startled cry from Artie, a shriek from Margy, and the rest looked up in time to see Artie and the fence going over the bluff together.

"I told you so! I told you so!" cried poor

Polly, rushing for the edge of the bluff. "Artie—Artie—are you hurt?"

In her excitement she would have gone over the bluff, too, for the grass was dry and slippery and the drop straight and not gradual, but Fred pulled her back in time.

"Get down flat—flat on your stomachs, and stay as far back from the edge as you can and still see over," he ordered. "The ground is crumbly, and you don't know when you're likely to find yourself rolling down."

In spite of his orders, Fred risked leaning far out over the bluff. Down about half way between the top and the ragged shore line, he saw a tangle of fence and a small dark figure in the middle of it that must be Artie. Evidently some scraggly bushes had stopped his fall.

"Hello!" shouted Fred. "Hello, Artie! Are you hurt?"

To his relief, Artie stood up and waved his hand.

"I'm—all—right!" he shouted back. "The fence broke!"

No one laughed at this. They were too glad to find that Artie was safe.

"Do you want me to come back or go down and walk around the island?" cried Artie, already planning his rescue.

"Don't go down to the water," screamed Polly. "It's deep—the deepest place in the lake. Stay where you are, Artie."

"And don't try walking up," Fred commanded loudly. "That's all shale where you are and as slippery as glass. You'll miss your step and fall the rest of the way."

"Then how do I get up?" shouted Artie.

"You stay there and we'll get you up," directed Fred.

"We'll have to get a rope," he said to the others. "A rope to pull him up with. The clothesline will do, I guess."

"No, that rope tied around the boxes is heavier," said Ward. "It's new, too, and the clothesline is worn out. I'll go get it, Fred."

"Jess can run faster than you can," replied Fred, not unkindly. "You get out of breath so easily, Ward. You run, Jess, and bring us the rope. And, Polly, you go on talking to Artie so he won't get tired waiting and try to walk up himself."

Polly hung over the bluff and kept up a running fire of conversation with Artie. He was inclined to be impatient and, as Fred had foreseen, would have attempted the climb himself, if left to his own devices.

"It's hot down here, Polly," he complained.

"My finger's bleeding. I scratched it on a nail."

"Jess will be back in a minute with the rope," Polly comforted him. "Wrap your handkerchief around your finger."

Artie, it developed, had no handkerchief.

"If I throw mine down to him, the wind will carry it away," said Polly, perplexed.

"I know—wrap it around the bottle of water and throw it down," suggested Margy.

"And have the bottle hit him on the head!" said Fred, scornfully. "Or else break and fill the handkerchief full of splintered glass. If that isn't just like a girl!"

"Say, when Jess does get the rope, what can we tie it to?" asked Ward.

"A tree," replied Fred, confidently. "That tree nearest the bluff."

"Artie! Jess is coming now!" Polly called encouragingly. "We'll throw a rope down to you in just a minute."

Jess came flying up the hill, the heavy rope coiled in her hands and around her arm. She had run "every step of the way," she told them, and her crimson cheeks were proof of her haste.

"I got it!" she cried joyfully. "I got it, Fred!"

But alas, the rope was not long enough! When Fred had tied it to the nearest tree, it reached to

the edge of the bluff and dangled over about three yards.

"Where's the rope?" they heard Artie shouting. "Why don't you send down the rope?"

Polly peered over at him.

"This one isn't long enough," she cried. "We'll have to get another one, Artie."

Fred explained that the rope was tied to a tree and would not reach.

"Stick my gun in the ground!" shouted Artie. "Stick it 'way in! That gun is as strong as a tree, if you put it in deep enough."

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THE WINDS BLEW

"THAT silly old gun!" said Margy, impatiently. "I don't see what good that is."

Fred examined Artie's treasure critically.

"I don't know—it's pretty heavy," he admitted. "I never could see how Artie lugs it around the way he does. Perhaps if we stick it barrel-end in the ground, near the edge, and tie the rope to it, it will hold. Artie isn't a heavy-weight, you see."

They pushed the gun into the earth and even hammered it in with their feet and when it held "steady" Fred looped the rope around it. As near as he could judge, he was just above the place where Artie had fallen.

"Here it comes!" cried Fred, letting down the rope slowly.

Flat on the ground, the others watched breathlessly. The rope twisted and turned, like a snake, creeping nearer and nearer to the eager Artie. When he grasped it, a long sigh went up from the watchers.

"Tie it!" shouted Fred. "Tie it around your waist. And then walk up, hand over hand. You'll have something to cling to."

Artie obediently tied the rope around his waist and then seemed to be busy with something else. They could see him bending over and picking up something.

"What are you doing?" called Polly. "Why don't you come up?"

"The fence!" shrieked Artie, hoarsely, for his voice was beginning to be strained. "I thought I'd bring the fence up, too."

Fred was sometimes called "bossy" by boys who did not like him—noticeably Joe Anderson—but his gift for leadership had often stood him in good stead. Now he made a megaphone with his hands and bellowed at the startled Artie.

"Drop that!" he shouted savagely. "Drop it! You come up here as fast as you can!"

Artie began to climb as though wild Indians were after him, and Fred laughed a little.

"The idea of bothering with that fence!" he said to Polly. "You never can tell what that kid's going to do next."

Artie crept up the side of the bluff, pulling hand over hand on the rope. His gun rewarded his faith in its staying powers by holding firm. As he

neared the top, five pairs of willing arms reached over and pulled him to safety.

"Gee, that was some fall!" said Artie, beaming on his friends. "I was just leaning on the fence, and all of a sudden there I was, going down the hill."

"Let's go back to camp," said Polly, hurriedly. "I don't want to stay here and look at that place where the fence was."

They were all willing to go back to camp, and, now that the excitement was over, they found they were hungry. It was past noon, and the girls quickly put lunch on the table. Artie seemed to be none the worse for his experience, save for a few slight scratches on his hands and face.

After lunch no one suggested going out again, so Polly thought it would be a good plan to work on the riddle Dick Hare had given them to solve.

"The only way we'll ever get it is to study over it," she said sensibly.

"I wonder what the prize will be?" speculated Margy.

"Read the riddle again, will you, Polly?" asked Jess.

Polly found the paper, on which the riddle was written, in a tin box.

"Let's go in one of the tents," she suggested.

"We can open the flaps, and it will be cooler."

The mess-house received the full glare of the afternoon sun, and it was not as comfortable as the tents, which faced the water. By folding the legs of the cots under in the day time, more room was gained, and with the tent flaps fastened back, the sleeping tents were roomy and shady.

Settled in the tent, Polly read the prize riddle aloud.

"My first syllable is company," read Polly. "My second slurs company, my third calls company together, and my whole amuses company. What am I?"

"That's a stiff one," said Fred. "Let's see, what words of three syllables do we know?"

"I don't know any," said Ward, hastily.

"Now there's just the trouble," said Polly. "The minute anything looks a little hard to you, you drop it and won't even try."

"Don't be a school teacher, Polly," begged Marge. "Three syllable words aren't flying around this camp—not so you could notice 'em."

"I'll bet we can dig up plenty of words," said Fred. "Look here, Artie, give me a word of three syllables. Think quick!"

The effect of this, of course, was to knock every word in his vocabulary out of Artie's head.

"You don't have to try to solve the riddle now,"

said Fred. "Just give me a word of three syllables."

"Beeswax," ventured Artie.

"That's only two!" declared Ward. "Say, Fred——"

"Wait till you're asked," Fred told him. "Come on, Artie, try again. Three syllables, remember."

Polly, behind Fred, formed a word with her lips. Artie understood.

"Remember!" he announced triumphantly.

"Polly, you told him that!" Fred whirled accusingly. "Oh, never mind, I suppose it will have to do. What about you, Ward?"

"Obhlerate," said Ward, puffing out his round face so that it resembled a balloon.

"Good gracious!" cried Polly, startled. "Where did you ever get a word like that?"

"Oh, I picked it up," said Ward, airily, his manner implying that he had other mouthfuls in reserve.

"Well, you can put it back," Fred informed him dryly. "That happens to have four syllables instead of three."

Ward said, "Oh!" and subsided for the time being.

"What's yours, Margy?" Fred turned to his sister.

"Look at that big, black cloud," was Margy's response. She had been staring at the weather and apparently had not heard a word that had been said. "I never saw such a black cloud."

Fred glanced impatiently out of the tent. The sun was still shining, but a heavy, dark cloud was rapidly approaching.

"I do wish you'd listen, Margy," he said. "You know a word of three syllables, don't you?"

"I suppose so," admitted Margy, her eyes still on the sky. "Would weather do? No, that has only two. Well, I'll say 'intruder,' Fred."

"But that hasn't anything to do with the riddle," protested Jess.

"I'm only trying to see if this bunch knows a word of three syllables when they hear it," explained Fred, gloomily.

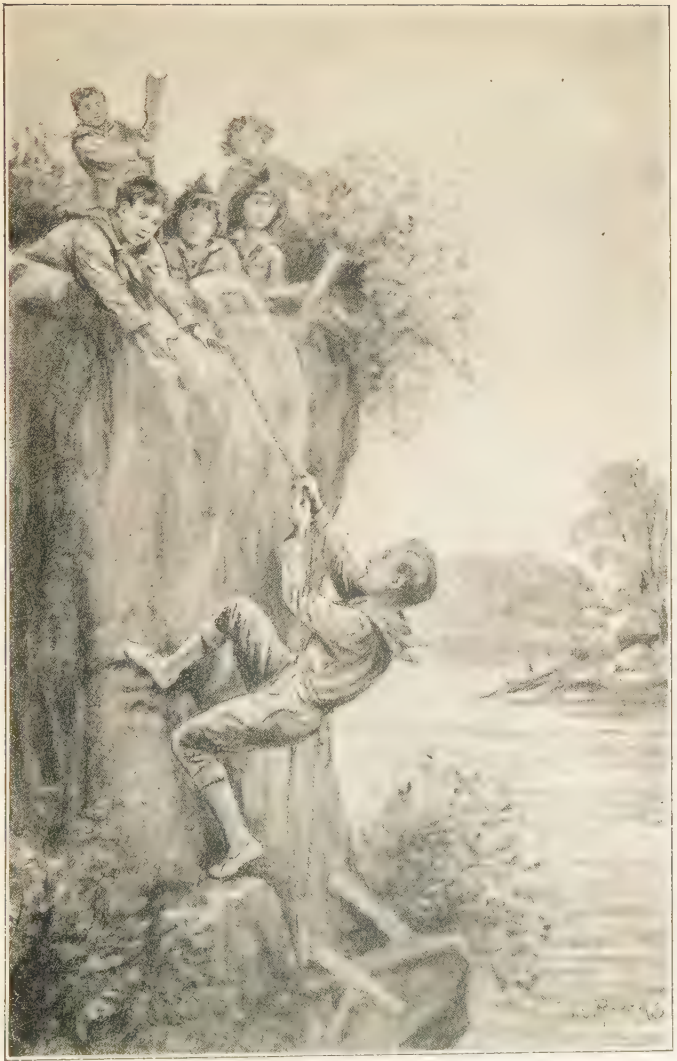
"Goodness, I didn't know we had to go to school," murmured Jess.

"Polly, have you a good one?" asked Fred, hopefully.

"All I can think of have two," said Polly. "Canoe and riddle and hermit. Oh, I know, Fred—thunderstorm."

"I *wish* you'd look at this cloud!" murmured Margy.

"Never mind the weather," said Fred, carelessly. "Got a word, Jess?"



ARTIE PULLED HIMSELF UP.

The Riddle Club in Camp.

Jess had been knitting her brows in deep thought. Like Ward, she wasn't sure she had counted her syllables correctly.

"I'm not sure whether it has three or four syllables, Fred," she explained hesitatingly.

"Go ahead—I'll tell you," he encouraged her.

"Maybe it isn't right," said Jess, still reluctant to expose her lack of knowledge.

"What word is it?" asked Fred, now curious.

"Banjo," said Jess, placidly. "What are you laughing at?"

"You're shy one syllable," Fred informed her.

"Never mind, Jess, it doesn't really matter. I'll take iodine for my word, I guess; we put enough on Artie's scratches this morning."

"Look at the flags!" cried Margy. "And it's just as dark! Oh, Fred, maybe there'll be a thunderstorm."

"No such thing," said Fred, stoutly. "Let me look."

Margy was desperately afraid of thunderstorms. She was ashamed of the fear and fought to overcome it, but the first peal of thunder was sure to send her flying to a place of safety—in her mind a place as dark as possible and as far removed from a window as she could get. At home she was always to be found in the depths of a clothes closet—Fred said it was a wonder she

wasn't smothered—and during the one storm they had had in camp Polly had found her under the cot. That storm had come during the night, and had not been severe.

"It is dark!" said Fred, stepping outside the tent. "Hey, Ward, come look! I never saw it as dark as this before."

The others crowded to the tent opening. What they saw awed them, even Polly, who did not know what it was to be afraid.

The sun was completely hidden and the sky was black. It had the curious appearance of being lower, as though they might be able to touch it, if it came much closer. The lake was rough and choppy and many small craft were scurrying for safe harbor.

"Is it a thunderstorm?" whispered Margy, fearfully.

"More like wind," answered Fred, briefly. "You'd better take those do-cubs in, if you want them afterward."

He pointed to the dish towels and the bathing suits hanging on the line. Polly started for them, and at that moment the wind struck the island. It came with a suddenness and a force that was amazing. Margy always declared that she heard it shriek, and it is quite likely she did. A dish towel Polly had in her hand was whisked away

and the flag pole bent, then sprang back with a snap.

"The flags!" cried Artie. "Get the flags!" and he dashed for the pole, Fred after him.

A cry from Ward made them turn in time to see the tent lifted from the floor and flap and bang in the gusts of wind. During the next few minutes Ward and the blankets and bedding seemed to be hopelessly mixed. When Fred and Jess finally sorted them out, the fat boy was breathless.

"Is—it—a cyclone?" he gasped, when he could speak.

"It's just a wind storm!" shouted Fred, for the wind was making such a noise it was difficult to hear.

"Ow!" shrieked Marge. "Ow, Fred! Look at the stove pipe!"

As she spoke, the stove pipe, run through a hole in the roof of the lean-to, tottered and fell with a crash.

"What's that?" screamed Jess, pointing to something that was rolling over the grass, in the direction of the water.

"Catch it!" called Polly. "Catch it! That's the potato basket!"

Baskets were precious in camp, for there was no cellar, and keeping the provisions had proved

something of a problem. Ward started after the basket, and just then the door of the lean-to blew back and a flutter of red tablecloths, aprons and towels, proclaimed that the basket of clothes standing on the table had been overturned.

"Fred! Jess!" cried Polly, trying to pick up three clean napkins at once. "Fred! Look! Isn't that a boat?"

She pointed out toward the lake, and Fred raised his head. The wind whistled round his ears as he strained his eyes to see.

"It is a boat!" he said.

"What are you looking at?" cried Margy.

"A boat!" called Jess. "Oh, the man will be drowned! Look out!" she tried to cry in warning, as the boat crashed against another craft that was anchored in the lake.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNFORTUNATE NEIGHBOR

THE wind blew just as strongly, but the Riddle Club paid little heed to it now. They were lined up on the shore, watching the frail little boat bobbing up and down. Once or twice it tipped so that Margy cried out that it had capsized, but it came up again each time.

"Jess," exclaimed Polly, suddenly, "that's the old hermit!"

"I thought it looked something like that crazy boat of his," said Fred. "You'd think he would know better than to be out in a storm like this, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, it began to blow without much warning," protested Polly. "I suppose he was out and didn't have time to put in to shore. But I don't see why he doesn't try to come in to our landing."

"I'll bet he's lost the oars," said Artie, wisely. "He doesn't seem to be doing anything. Look at him now!"

The old hermit—if it was he—had been sitting

slumped forward in the bow of the boat. Now he crumpled up and slid from sight.

"He's hurt!" said Fred sharply. "I think the wind is blowing the boat toward us. We'll be ready to give it a pull, if it comes near enough."

The boys stripped off their shoes and stockings and waded into the water while the three girls, the wind blowing their hair so wildly that it stood out stiffly behind them, hung on the edge of the landing, ready to lend a hand.

Fiercely as the "balmy hurricane" (so the River Bend paper called it the next day) was blowing, it was imperceptibly lessening. The boat drifted toward the shore slowly, but it drifted. When it was close enough for Fred to see some one lying in the bottom, his head resting on one of the seats, he and Artie and Ward boldly waded in up to their waists and grasped the bow. They managed to steer it toward the landing and the girls held it fast till it could be tied.

"Are you hurt?" asked Polly, anxiously, of the motionless figure.

It was the old hermit. He raised his head, and though his face was twisted by the pain he was enduring, he tried to smile.

"I am so sorry," he said. "I would like to rest here, just a minute. You know who I am, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Polly, without stopping to think. "You live——" But the old man interrupted her.

"Tell me!" he begged. "Tell me quickly. My name? I knew you could tell me. And where I live, also."

Polly looked distressed.

"I don't really know who you are," she said gently. "None of us does. You are living on Triangle Island, you know."

The old man's head dropped.

"Yes, I live there— because I have forgotten my home," he murmured. "That is as good a place as any other."

Fred thought it time to interfere.

"What's the matter with your leg?" he asked abruptly, pointing to the bandages that were wrapped around one of the hermit's legs.

He still wore his red dressing gown and the bandages were of blue and white gingham, and evidently had once been an apron.

"My leg?" repeated the old man, vacantly. "Oh, yes, my leg."

Ward looked at Artie. They wanted to laugh, but hoped they wouldn't. The old hermit was in bad shape, any one could see that.

"Have—-you—hurt—your—leg?" asked Jess, distinctly and slowly.

"Yes, I did," answered the old man with astonishing briskness. "I fell and sprained it one afternoon. I couldn't get back to the shack—had to lie out all one night. It rained on me, too. Then this afternoon I caught it again, trying to push off from that boat anchored out there, and I twisted it some more."

"Do you think you could walk?" asked Polly, respectfully.

"Walk? Where to?" said the hermit, startled.

"Up to the tent," said Polly. "Then you can lie on one of the cots and be comfortable and the doctor will come and look at your leg."

The wind had died down by now and the sun was out, hot and bright again.

"I'd rather stay here," said the old hermit, comfortably.

The others did not know what to do or say next, but Polly was not at a loss.

"You can't," she said earnestly. "You mustn't. It won't be convenient. You'll make us a lot of trouble."

The old man tried to rise.

"I shouldn't like to do that," he said simply.

"You help him, Fred," directed Polly. "We'll hold the boat steady, while you and Artie pull him out; then let him lean on your shoulder and he

can get to the tent. He'll have a sunstroke if we leave him in the boat in this blazing sun."

The girls held the boat steady while the boys pulled and tugged at the patient old man who could do little to help himself. When they finally had him on the landing, they found he could walk better than they supposed. It was the climb up from the boat to the landing that had been difficult for him with his twisted leg.

The little procession went slowly toward the tent, but Polly was repaid for her insistence when she saw the old man relax on one of the comfortable cots in the cool, shady tent. She sent Artie and Fred to town for the doctor. While she and Margy picked up the scattered belongings the wind had blown about, Ward and Jess fastened the loosened tent in place once more, and when the three mothers and the doctor arrived simultaneously, the camp was once more in order.

Joe Anderson had met Fred and Artie on the road, and, rather to their disgust, had insisted on returning with them. While the doctor was examining the old hermit, the children were shooed off, and they sat down under a tree at some distance to rest after their strenuous last hour.

"He'll have to go to the poorhouse, of course," said Joe, matter-of-factly, "unless it's something

they have to operate on. In that case, Doctor Eagles will take him to the hospital at Warren, I suppose."

"Mother said something about keeping him here till he is well enough to go back to his island," said Polly.

"Nobody wants a pauper around," declared Joe. "That old man would be an awful nuisance. You'd have to wait on him. Besides, he's crazy, and you certainly don't want a lunatic for a camp friend, do you?"

Fred had not been enthusiastic when Mrs. Marley spoke to his mother about taking care of the old man, but something in Joe Anderson's cold-blooded talk made him furious.

"How would you like it, Joe," he suggested, "if you were old and poor and sick and the best any one was willing to do for you was to send you to the poorhouse? Would you like that?"

"When I get old, I mean to have plenty of money," returned Joe, confidently. "You don't catch me going around in a red satin dressing gown and not being able to tell any one who I am or where I live. Not for Joe Anderson, thank you!"

"The hermit may have plenty of money," said Jess. "He doesn't know who he is. Maybe he is a missing millionaire."

"If he could only remember something about himself," sighed Polly.

"Gee, I wouldn't like to lose my mind like that and forget who I was," said Fred. "I suppose he just wandered away from his folks and never could find his way back."

"My father always carries a card with his name and address on it," boasted Joe. "You don't have to forget who you are, if you use a little sense."

Artie's blue eyes looked angry.

"You can lose a card, can't you?" he challenged. "My grandmother is forever losing cards with addresses on 'em. Wait till you're an old, old man, Joe Anderson; perhaps you won't have a friend left to be sorry for you, if you do forget who you are."

"Anyway, he isn't crazy," chimed in Margy. "I heard Doctor Eagels say so. You don't have to be crazy to forget, do you, Jess?"

Jess shook her head.

"The doctor's going now," she said. "Let's ask Mother what he said."

The doctor waved a friendly hand to the group as he went over the bridge to his car. Mrs. Marley carefully adjusted the mosquito netting over the tent opening, and she and Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Williamson came over to the waiting circle.

"His leg isn't broken, is it?" asked Fred, anxiously.

"No, Fred, not broken," replied Mrs. Williamson. "It has been rather badly sprained, but a little rest ought to cure it, Doctor Eagles thinks. But the poor old man is sick—really sick."

The Riddle Club members looked solemn. They were sorry for any one who had to be sick in the summer time.

"He hasn't had the right things to eat for a long time," said Mrs. Marley. "Cooking for himself, he has lived out of tin cans, and not too many of them. And he has suffered exposure, which, at his age, is apt to bring serious consequences."

"You're not going to let him stay here, are you, Mrs. Marley?" asked Joe, quickly.

Mrs. Marley glanced at him a little curiously.

"Why not, Joe?" she asked.

"Oh, he's out of his head," said Joe. "And you never can tell what a crazy person will do. Besides, he can't walk, and some one will have to take him his meals and wait on him."

"Well, at that, some one might do worse," said Mrs. Larue, briskly. "However, Joe, I'm glad to tell you, that David—that's the only name he gives us—David will be able to hobble around camp and get to the table, at least. We are go-

ing to try to look after him till he is well enough to go back to Triangle Island. It is out of the question for him to try to live by himself in his present condition. He might set himself afire, or fall out of his ramshackle boat. It won't hurt one of us to do a little something for an unfortunate neighbor while we are having such a happy vacation."

Joe Anderson did not dare argue, but he went back to Camp Conundrum and spread the news that "a lunatic" was living at the Riddle Club's camp. Dick Hare heard the rumor and came over to see.

"You certainly have trumps for mothers!" he said, when he found out the truth. "It's a shame the way that poor old man has been left to himself. He is perfectly harmless, and any one can see he comes from educated people. I'm glad some one has the charity and decency to try to help him."

The old hermit hobbled about camp happily enough, never in the way and always busy. The first day or two he kept asking the different ones who he was, but he soon accepted the fact that they could not tell him. Then he would sit silently for hours, under one of the trees, either reading a book or whittling the bits of soft wood the boys brought him. It was not long before he

begged to be allowed to peel potatoes or string beans, or do something that would help the house-keeping in the camp. The three mothers were reluctant to give him tasks until they saw that he was happier if he believed he was of assistance; then they tried to invent little jobs that would not task his strength and which yet would give him employment.

He ate heartily, with such enjoyment that Mrs. Marley declared she knew he had been half starved all summer. And he loved the campfire. He would sit till the last ember burned down, never speaking.

It was Fred who thought of something to amuse him, and he said nothing to any one of his plan. Then, one afternoon, he shouted for the others to "come and see."

"Look at David!" he cried. "Mother! Mrs. Larue! Polly! Come and watch David having the time of his life!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMING CARNIVAL

"WELL, I never!" declared Mrs. Williamson, when she saw what Fred had done.

There sat the old hermit, the radio ear-sets on his ears, listening complacently to an afternoon concert.

"Why, he likes it!" cried Ward. "See him smile!"

Indeed, the old man's face was wreathed in smiles and he kept time with one hand. Plainly he was enjoying himself.

"He was sitting under the tree," Fred explained. "I happened to think there might be something going on, and I took up one of the phones to listen. Then I thought it would be fun to surprise David, and I clamped them on his ears. You ought to have seen him! He wouldn't let me take them off."

Though, so far as the Riddle Club knew, the hermit had never seen a radio set before and, like as not, had never before heard of such a thing,

from that hour he became a most enthusiastic "fan." When his leg troubled him more than usual—and he had days of real pain to endure—he would lie patiently on his cot and listen for hours at a time.

The Riddle Club had used the radio very seldom since their arrival in camp. They had had few rainy days, and every clear day was so packed to overflowing with interesting plans to be accomplished that sitting still and listening was not to be considered. They were very glad, however, that the set was there and that the old man found so much pleasure in using it.

One thing they had learned in their closer acquaintance with the gentle old hermit—he could tell them something about the weather. In other words, he was "weather-wise," as Dick Hare said, and, perhaps because he had lived outdoors so much, could tell with a fair degree of accuracy what might be expected from the weather twenty-four hours in advance.

"Polly," said Mrs. Marley, one warm afternoon. "Don't you want to go over to town for me? I have a list of things we need and a prescription the doctor left this morning for Dave. You'll have to wait a little while to get that filled. Dave says it is going to rain to-morrow, so I don't want to wait for the groceries."

"We'll all go, Mrs. Marley," offered Fred. "Then we can bring the stuff home with us. You know the last time the grocer had a new boy, and he left our order at Camp Conundrum instead of here. We'll bring everything back, and then, if it rains to-morrow, we won't have to tramp around the country, rounding up the stuff that's lost."

Perhaps Mrs. Marley had suspected that they would all want to go, for she gave the list and the prescription to Polly, the money to Fred, and to Ward, Artie, Jess and Margy, she handed four strong, stout bags that would hold a number of packages safely.

"Keep in the shade as much as you can," she advised them, "and walk slowly. Don't hurry. And get yourselves some ice-cream before you come back."

The old hermit was sitting under his favorite tree when they left the camp. He had the ear phones on, but he took them off to ask wistfully: "You know who I am, don't you?"

"No," said Fred, kindly, but firmly. "No, Dave. Go on and listen to the music. You'll miss the first violin, if you're not careful."

"He hasn't asked us that for a long time," said Polly, walking over the bridge. "I thought he was forgetting he was lost, maybe."

"He didn't sleep well last night," replied Jess.

"I heard him stumping around outside the tent. I told Mother this morning, and they sent for Doctor Eagels—that's his new prescription you're going to get filled."

Margy scuffed along contentedly in the dust. She liked to scuff.

"I wonder what makes him think it will rain to-morrow?" she asked curiously. "The sun is so hot and there is hardly a cloud in the sky."

"Well, he can tell, all right," replied Fred. "Mrs. Meade told me that he knew more about it than the farmers who always study the weather before they set out a new crop or when they want to hold a Grange picnic."

"Does he live on Triangle Island all winter, Fred?" inquired Polly. "I never heard that."

"I think Mrs. Meade said folks first noticed him around here early in March," answered Fred.

The children trudged steadily on, and, though it was a warm day, they managed to have a good time on the way. Polly, while apparently joining in the chatter and singing, managed to plan a program, and just as they came in sight of Lake Bassing, she announced it.

"I think the best thing to do," said she, "is to take that list to the grocery store. While the clerk is filling the order, we'll go to the drug store and leave the prescription. Then we'll have some

ice-cream, next we'll see if that book is in your mother asked for, Ward, and then we'll go back and get the groceries and leave the medicine to the last."

"All right," agreed Margy. "I didn't know Mrs. Larue wanted a book."

"She said the next time we went to town she wanted the second one of the set she's reading—don't you remember?" said Polly. "This time she didn't say anything about it, but it will be nice if we can get it to surprise her."

"If we can get it, yes!" exclaimed Jess. "This funny little library here is open only two days a week, and then for not more than two hours during the day."

The six chums did not believe in foolish separations, so they went to the grocery store in a body and deposited the list with the clerk. From the grocery store they went to the drug store, stopping in the post-office by the way because it was in their path and because no one who lives out of town would think of passing the post-office without asking for mail, and then they sought the confectioner's shop where oil-cloth covered tables proclaimed that ice-cream was served.

The ice-cream parlor was rather dark—the proprietor thought the dark shades made the place cooler and discouraged the flies—and the Riddle

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Club had settled at a table in one corner before they noticed the others in the room.

"Hello!" said Carrie Pepper, and Joe Anderson and Mattie Helms and Albert Holmes echoed her greeting.

"Hello!" returned Polly. "Did you walk over?"

"Rode," said Carrie. "Dick Hare brought us."

Then the Riddle Club members had to give their undivided attention to the orders for ice-cream, and conversation was interrupted.

"Have you seen the posters?" asked Carrie, when six plates had been placed on the table and the strawberry that Polly had ordered had been rescued from Fred and Ward's favorite chocolate had been saved from Margy's spoon and every one had the right flavor at last.

"What posters?" said Polly, wondering why she should be expected to supply all the conversation. She shot Artie a sisterly glance that prodded him to speak.

"Is a circus coming?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course not," said Carrie, in a tone that conveyed her idea of a boy who could consider a circus. "It's about the boat carnival."

"Oh!" Fred seemed to understand. "They

do have a carnival every year, don't they? But I thought it was later in the season."

"Three weeks from Saturday," Joe Anderson declared. "They've got a list of the prizes offered hanging in the drug-store window. Lots of people are going in this year. Those two artists that live on the island next to ours are going to be hostesses to the judges. They trim their island up every year with flags and things, and it's the best place on the lake to see from."

"Gee, I'd like to see it," said Ward. "Will it be all boats?"

"Of course!" Joe Anderson spoke impatiently. "You can't have a parade on the water, can you? Haven't you ever heard of the Lake Bassing Water Carnival?"

"Yes, he has," apologized Jess, "but he never saw one. None of us has."

Neither had Carrie or Joe, for that matter, but they didn't think it necessary to mention this.

"We're going to have a float," said Carrie, importantly. "My mother will give us the money, and we'll have an entry worth looking at."

"Oh!" said Polly. "Can any one go in the carnival, Carrie?"

"Sure," said the girl who had brought their ice-cream. "The more floats they have, the better

the committee likes it. Last year we had thirty, and people came from all over the State to see. Carnival Day is Lake Bassing's big wind-up for the summer."

"Well, of course I'm not sure," announced Carrie, standing up, "but I think the committee has something to say about the kind of floats. They wouldn't want just an ordinary, common kind. With guests from everywhere, they naturally care about the town's name—nothing cheap or silly, would do. That is, I don't think it would."

"You might let the old hermit be a float," said Joe, unkindly. "His mind is floating anyway. He stopped me the other day as I was going by your mail box and asked me if I knew who he was."

"I should think he'd drive your mother wild, Polly," declared Carrie. "My mother says he ought to be in the state hospital. Well, we have to go, or we'll miss the bus. Come over some night, won't you? Good-bye."

"Don't you pay any attention to what she said," cried the girl who had served the ice-cream, barely waiting till the screen door had banged behind the Conundrum Club representatives. "I don't know who she is, but she doesn't know what she is talking about. You can enter any kind of a float in the carnival—it doesn't matter what it is or how

little it costs; the floats are inspected before you begin to decorate, to make sure the boats are safe and don't leak, and after that you may go as far as you like. My father is on the town committee, and I guess I know."

Their ice-cream finished, the six chums went to the little neighborhood library for the book—and found it in, to Polly's delight—and then to the grocery store, where their packages were wrapped and waiting for them. They divided the burden evenly and set out for the drug store where the hermit's medicine was waiting and where, Carrie had said, a list of the float prizes was to be found.

"Gee," said Artie, studying the typewritten list pasted inside the one large window. "What's a candleberry, Polly?"

"That's a candelabra," explained Polly. "You know, like the one Mother has—a candle stick that will hold three candles."

"What a silly prize!" sniffed Ward.

"Oh, lots of people like them," said Polly, cheerfully. "But look at the first prize for floats entered by children under fifteen—it's a loving cup. Isn't it a beauty?"

Fred studied the silver cup lined with gold carefully.

"You know," he said deliberately, "that wouldn't

look bad in our clubroom up in the barn—would it, Ward?"

"Fat chance we stand of getting it!" retorted Ward. "It would be our luck to win the silver pepper shakers or the oyster fork."

"Are we going to have a float?" questioned Margy. "I don't think we know much about making a float, do you, Polly?"

"I think we could try," said Polly, quietly.

She went in and got the bottle of medicine and then they started to walk back to camp. The subject of the water carnival was uppermost in their minds, of course, and whether or not they should have a float entered, was the question to be argued. Fred was holding forth in his best and most rapid style, when Jess interrupted him, pointing up the road and calling his attention to something ahead of them.

"Looks as though some one had spilled the beans," said Fred, with a grin, and Jess whispered back:

"Oh, aren't you too mean!"

CHAPTER XX

NEW FRIENDS

Two elderly women stood in the road ahead of them. One was still holding the broken paper bag from which the little mountain of beans at her feet had streamed. The other was down on her knees, trying to scoop up the beans in a flimsy envelope. A number of parcels lay scattered about on the grass that bordered one side of the road.

"Don't snicker," cautioned Polly. "Let's try to help them."

They walked till they had reached the strangers, and Fred was the first to ask if they could not be of use.

"I don't see what you can do," said the woman, who was down on her knees. "It's a waste of time to try to pick these beans up, but it is also wasteful to go away and leave them."

She was a plump, pleasant-faced woman with pretty, dark eyes and what Polly afterward described to her mother as "a laughing voice."

"She sounded as though she was going to laugh the next minute," Polly explained, when asked what a laughing voice was like.

The woman who held the broken bag had a pleasant face, too, but graver. Neither wore a hat, and their hair was gray, almost white.

"We can take the things out of one of our bags," said Jess, "and put the beans in. Then we'll divide the packages up among us, and we won't miss the bag at all."

"Oh, no, we mustn't give you all that trouble," protested the taller woman.

But Margy had already tumbled the groceries out of her shopping bag and was handing it to Fred.

"Well, if you children are going to insist on saving these beans," said the brown-eyed woman, rising, "I believe I'll let you. I'm not used to breaking my back, and another minute of that stooping over would surely have me in two pieces."

The six chums set busily to work, scooping up the beans. Six pairs of hands do a task quickly, even when that task is to gather up slippery beans.

"You don't mind if we take up some dirt, too, do you?" asked Artie, a little shyly. "My Mother always washes beans before she bakes them."

"We won't mind the dirt. That is easily sifted and washed out," the two ladies assured him.

"I'm sure I never saw kinder children," said the short, plump one.

"Perhaps they're neighbors," suggested the taller one. "Do you live in Lake Bassing?" she added.

"No'm, we live in River Bend," said Polly, busily capturing an elusive bean. "We're camping on Tom's Island this summer."

"Oh, then you must be the Riddle Club!" cried the short, plump woman. "You are neighbors indeed. We live on Harry's Island—at least in the summer. I am Miss Perry and this is Miss Spencer."

The others merely stared, but Polly knew them at once.

"Are you the artists?" she asked.

"Yes, we're artists," said Miss Perry, smiling. "Did Carrie Pepper tell you that? We met the Conundrum Club one afternoon, and they told us about you."

"Dick Hare told us you were living on Harry's Island," answered the honest Polly. "When we first came."

She did not think it necessary to add what Dick Hare had told them on his last visit, namely, that "the two artists," as Miss Perry and Miss Spencer were known to the whole town, had taken down the bridge that led from their island to the main-

land because of the too great curiosity of the members of the Conundrum Club.

"They would have been over there morning, noon and night, I heard," Dick Hare had said. "They handled the paints and the wet canvases and ran wild over the island. Those two artists hold a big exhibition in the city every winter, and they count on getting a lot of work done through the summer. I think it's a shame Mrs. Helms or Mrs. Pepper couldn't tell the kids to stay away. Now every time those two women want to come to town they have to row over to the mainland in a boat."

"I don't see another bean!" announced Ward, triumphantly. "And they aren't hurt a bit!"

Miss Perry laughed and took the bag.

"You're just wonderful," she praised them. "We'll never forget your kindness. I wish you'd come to see us—we'll row over to your island and get you some afternoon."

"We have to bring the bag back, anyway," said Miss Spencer. "Can't I carry some of those packages for you, as far as your bridge?"

"I was just going to ask you that," declared Fred. "You have more to carry than we have, for there are six of us."

"That new grocery boy mixes up the orders so

that it is easier to do your own delivering," said Miss Perry.

They were walking down the road now, talking like old friends. The Riddle Club liked the two artists, and the artists felt that they liked the boys and girls. They had spent several summers at Lake Bassing, they said, and they apparently knew every one for miles around.

"If this is your first summer up here," Miss Perry said, "you'll enjoy the water carnival. I've seen it six times, but it improves each year."

"We saw the list of prizes in the drug store," said Jess, excitedly.

"Did you notice that one is given for floats entered by children under fifteen years?" asked Miss Spencer. "You ought to try for that."

"We never made a float," Margy objected.

"The Conundrum Club is going to have one," said Ward.

"Why, of course. And so must you," Miss Perry said energetically. "I'll tell you what you must do: 'Come over to our island and work out a decorative scheme. We have loads of material which you may use, and welcome.'"

"We'll come over to-morrow and return the bag and call on your mother," Miss Spencer planned. "Then we'll bring you back in the boat with us."

You must enter a float—it would be a shame not to try. The committee is anxious to have as many as possible."

"You're not all brothers and sisters, are you?" said Miss Perry, who had been studying the children as she talked. "No, I remember, Carrie Pepper said not. But you must be great friends, because she said you do everything together."

"Oh, we do," answered Polly, smiling. "Even the prize riddle we're working on. Dick Hare gave it to us, and none of us has solved it yet."

"Tell me," begged Miss Perry. "I dote on riddles."

So Polly repeated Dick Hare's riddle, but neither artist could answer it.

"I'd rather design a float," said Miss Spencer. "Well, we'll come over to-morrow, about two in the afternoon."

They had reached the bridge that led to Tom's Island now, but Fred lingered.

"Won't it be too long a row for you?" he asked. "And then, taking six of us back——"

"Oh, we have a power boat," returned Miss Perry, carelessly. "We use that when we're going any distance. We moved half of our stuff that way this summer."

Mrs. Larue was delighted to have her book, Mrs. Marley welcomed the groceries, and Dave

was sure the medicine would make him well. But no one had much chance to talk of anything but floats and water carnivals and artists and power boats.

"I think they're lovely to offer to help us," said Margy. "You would think they'd had about all the children they could stand, after Carrie Pepper and her crowd went over there and camped out."

"Why, Margy Williamson, how you do talk!" said Mrs. Williamson, gazing at her daughter in astonishment. "That's a very ill-natured remark."

"Carrie makes me ill-natured," Margy declared. "You ought to have heard her and Joe Anderson this afternoon!"

True to their promise, the two artists came over the next day. Mrs. Williamson and Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Marley were charmed with them, and the adults found so much to talk about that the children began to fear they would not get off in time to do any work on their float. But Miss Perry knew what they were thinking, and she broke off in the middle of a story to say:

"If we're going to get a prize float under way, I think it's time we started home."

"We have a boat all ready for you," declared Miss Spencer. "It's one of those wide, flat-bot-tomed affairs," she explained to the mothers.

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"Practically unable to tip over. And you can trust us to see that nothing is topheavy and that everything is safe. Of course an older person will be with the children when the parade is given. It is a Saturday afternoon affair, you know, and quite a gala event."

"One of the fathers will go," promised Mrs. Marley.

"And you are hereby invited to come over to our island and see the show," said Miss Perry, gaily. "We have the judges' reviewing stand built on the north end of our place, and you get the best view on the whole lake. Bring Mr. Larue and Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson—though I suppose one of them will have to be on the float. Dick Hare is coming, too. And be sure the old hermit comes. He will enjoy the music, so don't let him stay away. We have oceans of room."

Polly would have done anything for Miss Perry and Miss Spencer from that moment, and Fred, later, confessed he felt the same way. They were all fond of the old man, who was so anxious not to be in the way and who, whenever he saw any one coming who might be "company" (even if it was only the grocery boy for orders), went away to his tent so that he might not have to be considered. But Polly was especially concerned

about him. She was very sorry for him and she thought it the kindest thing Miss Perry could have done—this leaving an invitation for him to come and see the carnival.

“Just the same as if he was folks,” Polly told her mother.

Long after the carnival was over, they found that seats in the judges’ stand were eagerly coveted and that each year the two artists received a flood of offers to buy space anywhere on their island.

The little power boat was waiting and the Riddle Club chugged away in it feeling like genuine sailors. When they passed Dick’s Island Carrie happened to be out, drying her hair in the sun. They shot by so fast she could not be sure who was passing, but she returned their waves, staring open-mouthed the while.

“Now I think,” said Miss Perry, when they had landed, “that the most important thing is to choose your color scheme first. What are the colors of the Riddle Club?”

“Blue and yellow,” answered Polly.

“Not good for this sort of thing,” said Miss Spencer, decidedly. “We want something cool and dainty.”

“Green and white?” spoke up Margy, who loved pretty things.

"That's a good combination," said Miss Spencer. "Do you all like green and white?"

Every one did, and Polly said that very few people knew the colors of the Riddle Club, so it wasn't necessary to try to display them.

"Can we keep our float a secret?" asked Fred, slowly. "So—so no one can copy the ideas and—and use them?"

He had in mind the habit of some of the Conundrum Club members who borrowed ideas with alarming frequency.

"We'll keep the boat here and you may come over and work on it whenever you wish," said Miss Perry. "The boathouse has a roof, so you won't be seen while you are at work. And no one lands here without an invitation, now we've removed the bridge."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," sighed Jess, "if we should win a prize!"

"No reason why you shouldn't," returned Miss Spencer, getting out a box of tools. "Luckily, we're not judges this year, so we can help you with advice. But the real building of the float you must do yourselves."

CHAPTER XXI

RAINY DAYS

THE Riddle Club worked hard that afternoon. Of course they could not finish the float that day, but they made a fair start. The boathouse was an excellent place to work in and, as Miss Perry had said, the roof covered the float completely and hid it from view.

When Miss Perry thought they had worked long enough, she told them to stop and she and Miss Spencer showed them over the island. It was really the prettiest of the three, and beyond it the lake widened and there were no more islands, so that a clear sweep of water was to be had. It was on this end of the island the reviewing stand was to be built.

After they had seen the island they had sandwiches and lemonade in the studio, and that was even more interesting. None of the children had ever been in such a place, and Polly, in her heart, thought she understood how Carrie Pepper had been unable to stay away, once having seen it.

The north side of the round building was of glass and the walls were covered with all kinds of pictures—some finished, some half done, and others mere sketches. Many scenes were familiar to the children—bits of the lake, boats and some of the quaint old houses in the town.

"I may as well tell you," said Miss Perry, when they had seen all the pictures and Miss Spencer had even made a little pencil sketch of them, standing in a row—as a souvenir, she said—"that I am anxious to have the old hermit come to the carnival. I want to sketch him. He is just the type to put in a picture I am planning. I do hope he'll come."

Miss Spencer took them home in the power boat and it was arranged that they were to come over the next week and work on their float. The two artists were very busy folk, and they couldn't have visitors every day.

You may be sure the Riddle Club had a great deal to tell when they were in camp again. The sketch was much admired. Mrs. Larue promised to have it framed for them, so that it might be hung in the clubroom when they went back to River Bend.

That night the drip! drip! of rain on the roof of the tent, wakened Polly.

"Dave said it was going to rain," she thought,

pulling the light blanket higher. "He said to-day, but he guessed it a little too early."

In the morning it was still raining, and it rained all that day and night. When the Riddle Club woke to the second rainy day, Artie was heard to grumble.

"Gee, I don't mind a little rain," said he, "but who wants a flood?"

"A great many people would be delighted if this downpour lasted a week," observed Mrs. Williamson. "We have had an exceptionally dry summer, and Mrs. Meade told me last week that one of their wells was dry. You wouldn't like it if it never rained, Artie, and there was no water to drink."

Artie said he thought it should rain at night.

"There's nothing to do, when it rains all the time," Ward complained.

"Why, Ward Larue, what a way to talk!" said his mother. "And you a member of the Riddle Club! Don't you want to hold a session this morning?"

"Of course," cried Polly, waving the dish towel gayly. "We'll have a good, stiff set-to with the riddles. Let's make it an open meeting and invite every one."

The breakfast table was cleared in a jiffy after that. The mess-house was the best place

for an indoor meeting, since the camp stools were all there and the table was convenient to gather around.

"Don't go, Dave," said Mrs. Williamson, pleasantly, when the old man would have shuffled out. "Stay and hear the riddles."

"I had the queerest dream last night," said Ward, suddenly. "I dreamed about you, Dave. You were sitting down at the wharf and I rowed up in a boat and I said, 'What's your name?'"

The old hermit shrank back.

"No—no," he said nervously. "I haven't any. I never had a name."

"I walked right up to you—like this," insisted Ward, walking up to the old man. "And I took hold of your coat and I said, 'What's your name?'"

"Why do you ask me?" quavered the hermit. "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where do I live?"

"Don't, Ward," cautioned Mrs. Marley. "You're exciting him, and the doctor said he should be kept quiet. Don't say another word about your dream. Go ahead and hold your club meeting."

The old hermit continued to sit in the corner to which he had retreated while Polly called the meeting to order. He shook his head and said,

"No, no," under his breath, and at intervals he stared around, saying, "Who am I?" in a low voice.

"Ward certainly stirred him up," whispered Mrs. Marley.

"Ward loves to tell his dreams," said Mrs. Larue. "When we're at home he usually takes up the breakfast hour describing what he has seen and heard during his sleep."

"We have plenty of time, so three guesses are allowed," said Polly. "Margy, it's your turn to ask the first riddle."

"I'll ask Jess," decided Margy. "Jess—say, has any one guessed Dick Hare's riddle yet?"

"What kind of a riddle is that?" demanded the indignant Jess.

"I just happened to think about the prize," apologized Margy. "We don't even know what it is yet."

"Well, I'm still working at it," said Fred. "He said he'd tell us the answer if none of us guessed it before Labor Day."

"This is the riddle I meant to ask you, Jess," announced Margy: "Why is a rooster on a fence like a penny?"

Jess frowned darkly. She always frowned when she was thinking.

"Is it because they're both coppers?" she asked.

"They aren't," said Fred.

"They are, too," Jess informed him. "At least, a Rhode Island Red is kind of coppery."

"That isn't the right answer," said Margy, hastily.

Jess thought again.

"Because they're both round?" she ventured.

"They're not," said Ward.

"Well, a penny is round and a rooster on a fence might be looking 'round," answered Jess, triumphantly.

To every one's surprise, the old hermit laughed.

"You're a real bright girl," he said to Jess.

"The rooster does look 'round, doesn't he?"

"But that isn't the answer to the riddle," declared Margy.

One more guess was left Jess, and she took a deep breath.

"Both are going to be put back," she said.

"The rooster in the henhouse and the penny in some one's pocket."

"Some of those answers ought to be right," announced Fred. "I think they're pretty good myself."

"This is the answer," said Margy: "Because his head's on one side and his tail's on the other."

"That isn't the right answer," said Jess, posi-

tively. "There's no tail on a penny—is there, Mother?"

"It's rather a complicated answer, perhaps," returned Mrs. Larue, smiling. "But it is right, dear. The side of a penny with the Indian's head on it is called 'heads' and the other side is known as 'tails.' "

"Don't make her pay a forfeit," suggested Polly. "She couldn't guess the answer if she didn't know that."

"No, that's a pretty hard riddle for a little girl to guess," said the old hermit.

He was sitting forward, his elbows on his knees, listening eagerly. The children had never seen him so interested.

"Your turn, Ward," said Polly.

Ward desired to "try" his riddle on Fred.

"What is always behind time?" he asked, looking sharply at the older boy.

"You are," Fred shot back.

Ward giggled good-naturedly. As a matter of fact he was seldom tardy.

"I know—the grocery list!" said Fred.

That made his mother and Mrs. Larue and Mrs. Marley laugh. It was their habit, while in camp, to keep the slip of paper, on which they wrote the things needed from the store, behind the alarm clock in the kitchen.

"Stop fooling," said Ward. "This is your last guess."

"Well, if you really want me to tell you the answer, I will," declared Fred coolly. "The back of a watch is always behind time."

Ward tried not to look disappointed.

"You knew it all the time!" he accused.

"Of course I did," said Fred. "That was easy. Wait till you hear the one I'm going to spring on Polly."

"It isn't your turn," said Polly. "Go ahead, Artie."

"Margy," began Artie, importantly, "When is the wind like a wood chopper?"

"When it is from the north," said Margy, promptly.

"That isn't right," protested Artie.

"Well, I thought they chopped wood up north," said Margy. "Is it when it is calm?"

Artie shook his head.

"I never have any luck guessing," mourned Margy. "You tell me—I'll give up."

"When it cuts," said Artie. "Isn't that easy?"

"They're all easy, when you know the answer," returned Margy, wisely. "Want a forfeit?"

"No, we're just doing this for fun," said Fred, eager to tell his riddle. "My turn, Polly? All

right, see if you can guess this one: When is a straight field not a straight field?"

"I never heard of a straight field," demurred Polly, "but I suppose they can be straight. I should say the answer is, 'when it is a corn and potato field.' Mr. Meade has one planted that way."

"Wrong, but getting warm," said Fred.

"When it is a grain field?" guessed Polly. "That isn't right? Dear me, Fred, I don't believe I can guess. Is it when it has a cross path?"

"Dead wrong," said Fred. "A straight field, Polly, is not a straight field, when it is awry field."

"How clever!" exclaimed Polly, dimpling. "Don't you see, Artie?" (for Artie was plainly puzzled). "Awry means crooked and r-y-e is a grain they plant."

The old hermit had risen to his feet, his eyes staring. He stepped up to the table and rested his hands on the edge.

"That's it!" he shouted hoarsely. "That's my name! I remember now! And that's where I come from, too!"

CHAPTER XXII

WARD HAS AN IDEA

POLLY drew back from the table, a little frightened. But Fred leaned across, his eyes sparkling.

"Say it again, Dave!" he begged. "Say it again."

"Say what?" murmured the old hermit, vacantly.

"You know—what you just said—your name and where you come from," urged Fred.

But the old man shook his head wearily.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, just as he had asked them a hundred times before.

Mrs. Williamson came over to the table now.

"I think the riddle reminded him of something," she said eagerly. "Ask the riddle again, Fred."

"When is a straight field not a straight field, Dave?" asked Fred, quickly.

To his surprise, the old man turned and shuffled back to his chair.

"Have a good time while you're young," he said gently. "Used to ask lots of riddles myself."

The Riddle Club exchanged glances. Fred wanted to laugh, but did not dare. The three mothers looked distressed.

"I thought we had a clue," said Mrs. Marley, disconsolately. "He certainly seemed to remember something about his name and where he came from."

"What else did you say, Polly?" asked Mrs. Larue. "There must have been something that stirred him up."

"I don't see what it could have been," mused Polly. "All we said was the riddle Fred asked me: 'When is a straight field not a straight field?' And then the answer, 'When it is awry field.'"

The old man sprang up again and hobbled over to them.

"That's it," he said with pitiful eagerness. "That's my name. And that's where I come from, too."

"What *do* you suppose he means?" puzzled Polly.

"There's something in the answer," said Mrs. Marley. "Don't excite him. All of you stand a little back and let me talk to him."

The children stood away from the table and Mrs. Marley spoke gently to the old hermit.

"What is your name, Dave?" she asked.

"I wish I knew," he said. "What is it?"

"Let me think over the words a minute," Mrs. Marley said patiently. "The only two it could possibly be are 'awry field.'"

"That's it!" cried the old man. "And that's where I come from."

"Is it 'field?'" asked Mrs. Marley. "Is your name Field? David Field? Is that right?"

"Yes, yes!" mumbled the old hermit. "David Ellis Field," he said more clearly. "Of course that is my name!" And he looked around the circle proudly.

"It is a fine name," said Mrs. Marley. "My husband knows a Field family. Then your home must be in Rye, Mr. Field. Isn't that the place?"

"Yes—yes," cried the old man again. "Rye, of course! I remember now."

"Mother, where's Rye?" asked Artie, absolutely unable to keep still one minute longer.

"Across the State line," replied Mrs. Marley. "I must let Daddy know about this. Don't bother Dave—we must call him Mr. Field, now that we know his name. There is no use in exciting him till we know something definite."

The old man had gone back to his camp chair and apparently had forgotten his newly found name. He was listening for more riddles.

But the Riddle Club were all too excited to set-

tle down and finish their meeting. Although it was still pouring, they wanted to walk to town and telephone Mr. Marley who knew a family named Field.

"You can't telephone, my dears, because you might not make him understand," said Mrs. Marley. "But if you are determined to be ducks, go and get into your rubbers and boots and storm capes and coats, and I'll dash off a letter which you may mail. Then perhaps we'll hear something by Saturday."

So the children got ready for the long walk in the rain, and by the time they were dressed in their "slickers" and overshoes, Mrs. Marley's letter was written.

It was mailed, but a disappointment was in store, for a letter came the next day from River Bend, saying that, because of a business convention, none of the three fathers would be able to spend that week-end in camp.

"We'll be up without fail the Saturday morning of the carnival," Mr. Marley wrote.

"This was written before he had my letter," said Mrs. Marley. "We'll just have to be patient and wait. Don't say anything to Dave—Mr. Field, I mean. There may be nothing to tell him, and we do not want to raise his hopes only to dash them."

The Riddle Club would have found it hard to wait if there had not been so much to do. The rain stopped after one more day of steady down-pour, and Miss Perry sent for them to come and work on their float. They knew the Conundrum Club was busily engaged in trimming a float, too, and Carrie did not mind announcing in advance that she was sure it would win the prize.

"If the carnival were only at night, we could have electric lights," she said to Polly, meeting her in the drug store one morning. "But I guess we'll have a fine float without lights. Mother lets us get anything we want and charge it at the store. You ought to see our float—I know it will take the prize!"

"We're going to have a float, too," said Polly.

"Oh—well, of course the more there are, the better the parade is," said Carrie. "But you know there is only one prize offered for the floats entered by children under fifteen. Other classes give second and third prizes, but not for children."

"What difference does that make?" asked Polly.

"Why, don't you see? You won't get anything," declared Carrie.

"Because your float will get the cup?" said Polly. "H'm—I didn't think of that."

Carrie was so sure that the float entered by the Conundrum Club was to get the prize that Polly

began to think so herself. Fred scoffed when she told him.

"Lots of people have been disappointed," said Fred, hammering away at the float under the boathouse roof. "You don't get everything you want in this world."

Miss Perry heard him and laughed.

"Mercy, Fred, you sound like an old, old man," she said. "But if I were you children, I'd stop thinking about the prize. Just put your best work on the float and be contented with what comes to you."

This was such good advice that they could do no less than follow it, and they worked so hard and to such advantage that the float was ready three full days ahead of the Saturday set for the carnival.

"I wonder if Dad will bring any news of Mr. Field," said Artie, one afternoon, when they were all sitting on the wharf in their bathing suits.

Ward was staring over toward the island where the Conundrum Club were in camp.

"Say," he drawled, "they have a flag, haven't they?"

"It's new," Fred informed him. "Joe Anderson was telling me about it. It's pure silk and the letters are woven on it—'Camp Conundrum.'"

"Dear me," said Margy, a little enviously,

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"they always have such perfectly lovely things."

"Huh, I don't see that a silk flag is any better than any other kind of a flag," argued Artie.

The silk flag rippled in the breeze and the letters—white on a background of dark blue—flashed in the sun. They could not be read at this distance, but the children knew they spelled "Camp Conundrum."

"Ward, why do you keep staring over there?" asked Polly, suddenly.

"Because," answered Ward, slowly, "I have an idea."

Artie giggled, but cautiously. He did not wish to risk being ducked.

"You needn't laugh," Ward retorted. "This is a good idea."

"All right, tell us," Fred invited lazily. "You may never have another idea, Ward."

Ward sniffed, but the desire to tell was too strong. He yielded.

"How do you spell 'conundrum?' " he asked.

"Is that your idea?" scoffed Margy. "I don't see anything great about that."

"Don't you know how to spell 'conundrum?' " asked Jess, who didn't herself, but hated to say so.

"It might be a good idea if you learned how to spell," said Fred.

Poor Ward was beginning to get angry, when Polly came to the rescue.

"I'll tell you, Ward," she said. "C-O-N-U-N-D-R-U-M—there."

"That's the way I thought you spelled it," explained Ward. "But I wasn't sure. And if that's right, I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked Artie.

"The answer to the prize riddle!" almost shouted Ward. "Don't you see—I thought it all out myself."

Fred was so surprised he nearly fell into the water, but he pulled himself back on the wharf instead, staring at Ward.

"You don't mean to tell me that you have solved the riddle, Ward!" Fred gasped. "Why, I've spent hours working on it!"

Fred did not mean to draw comparisons, he was merely surprised, too surprised to realize that what he said sounded a little vain.

"Don't you see?" said Ward again. "My first syllable is company—that's Co. of course; my second syllable shuns company—that's a nun; my third calls company together—that's drum; and my whole amuses company—that's——"

"Conundrum!" shouted the others in a noisy chorus.

"My goodness, Ward, I think you are wonder-

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ful!" said Jess, gazing at her brother with profound respect.

"So do I," agreed Margy. "I don't see how he ever did it."

"Oh, I thought a lot about it, and then it was easy," said Ward, modestly. "I wasn't sure how to spell 'conundrum' or I could have guessed it before. But that flag made me think more about it, and I was most sure I had it right."

"You've won the prize," said Polly. "Isn't that fine! And we must tell Dick Hare, because I think he had about made up his mind that none of us could guess it. Let's get dressed and go out to the bridge and wait for him. It's time for his afternoon trip now."

"What do you suppose the prize will be?" speculated Margy.

"I don't know, but I'll bet it will be something nice," said Jess.

"Candy," declared Artie, confidently. "Chocolates for all of us."

CHAPTER XXIII

FAIR ISLE PARK

THE six chums had not long to wait at the bridge. The honk-honk of a motor horn told them that Dick Hare was coming almost as soon as they had settled down on the strip of grass that bordered the road. Dick put on the brakes as soon as he saw them and stopped at the mail box.

"Hello," he said, smiling. "Going to town? Hop in."

"No-o, we weren't going," said Polly. "That is, we didn't say anything to the folks."

"We didn't come out here to go to town," declared Margy.

"No, that wasn't the reason," said Jess.

Dick Hare seemed puzzled.

"Seems to me you look mighty important," he announced.

"We have something to tell you!" cried Artie.

"Hush, Artie. Let Ward tell," commanded Fred, quickly.

"Ho-ho, so Ward has something to tell!" Dick exclaimed. "Come on, Ward, let's hear the great news. Have you won the carnival prize?"

"No, but I solved the prize riddle!" answered Ward, his face crimson.

"You have! Good boy!" Dick praised him. "I knew one of you youngsters would get it, sooner or later. But I rather banked on Polly or Fred."

"I did it all myself," explained Ward, proudly. "Didn't I, Fred?"

"Sure! First we heard of it was this afternoon when he sprang it on us," said Fred.

"Is 'conundrum' the word?" asked Ward, eagerly.

"Right!" said Dick Hare, heartily. "Congratulations, Ward. You've earned the prize fairly, and I'll tell you what it is. A day at Fair Isle Park!"

Ward's eyes danced. Fair Isle Park was an amusement park some three miles up the river from Lake Bassing. It was a large island, and the river boats touched at it only in summer. On the island were merry-go-rounds and scenic railways and magic caves and mazes and pet ponies to ride and, in fact, just about everything that could be asked in the way of exciting pleasure.

"When can you go, Ward?" asked Dick Hare. "I'll call for you and we'll drive up to Fair Isle

Landing and take one of the ferries across. That is better than taking a river boat, for we can go as early as we wish and come home when we are ready."

"Won't you have fun!" said Polly.

"You'd better go right away," advised Fred. "The carnival is Saturday, you know, and that's only two days off."

"We couldn't go this afternoon," said Dick. "But why not to-morrow? That will give you one day, Ward, to recover in and rest for the big Saturday."

"I won't need to recover," declared Ward, trying to stand on his head and falling over on the grass in the attempt.

"And he never needs to rest," said Jess.

"Well, then, I'll probably need the rest," Dick asserted. "After a day at the Park with Ward, something tells me I'll need a long rest. I'll be over by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, Ward."

"Thank you——" Ward was beginning, but Dick cut him short.

"You've earned your prize, and I hope you'll have a good time trying it out," he said, as he started his bus. "Nine o'clock sharp! Don't forget."

Ward was so excited he could not settle down after that. He did not want any supper, and the

only way to get him to do justice to the meal was to say, as Mrs. Larue did, that unless he ate properly she would think he was sick, and, of course, if he were ill, he couldn't go the next day. Ward did eat after his mother said that, but at half-past seven he announced he was going to bed so as to be "bright and fresh" for the next day.

"You're fresh enough now," Fred informed him. "And how you expect sleep to make you bright when you weren't born that way, I don't see."

Ward threw a pine cone at him and went off to bed, laughing. He suddenly appeared at the tent door, when ready for his cot, and electrified the group around the fire by shouting "Conundrum!" Then he disappeared for the night.

The others went to bed earlier than usual, too, for they shared Ward's excitement. Dave—or Mr. Field, as every one called him now—had prophesied fair weather for the next day, and the stars bore out his statement. Undoubtedly, Ward would have fine weather for his trip.

"I wish I'd solved the riddle," said Margy to Polly, as they began to get ready for bed.

"I wish I had, too," said Jess. "I've only been to Fair Isle Park once, and that was three years ago."

"Well, next year perhaps we can go on some of

the excursions," suggested Polly. "Anyway, Ward will have a beautiful time."

Over in the boys' tent, Artie and Fred were whispering, for Ward had gone to sleep. He often boasted that nothing could keep him awake.

"That was a fine prize all right," said Artie, throwing his shoes under his cot, his favorite method of disposing of them. "I wish I'd solved that riddle."

"Sure! So do I," responded Fred. "You have to give Ward credit for being clever. I wouldn't mind going to Fair Isle Park myself."

Every one was stirring early in the camp the next morning. Fred declared that Ward had gone down to swim before five, but Ward hotly denied this. He said it was six o'clock.

Breakfast was over by seven, and then there was nothing to do but wait for Dick and his bus. He must have suspected how hard it would be to wait, for he came half an hour ahead of the stipulated time.

Ward was waiting, and so were the others, standing in a row by the side of the road.

"All ready, I see," commented Dick Hare, who looked as gay as Ward.

"Well, I don't think it is polite to be late," said Ward, seriously.

"Hop in," said Dick, pointing to the seat beside him.

"I wish the rest of you were going," declared Ward, looking down at the others, from his seat beside Dick.

"What do you suppose I brought the bus for?" Dick inquired, his eyes twinkling.

Polly was the first to understand.

"You don't mean we can all go?" she cried. "All six of us?"

She knew Dick had a runabout, and she had wondered why he chose to take Ward in the bus, but the real reason had never entered her mind.

"I knew the Riddle Club couldn't be happy unless they were together," Dick replied. "Of course you are all to go."

"I'll tell Mother!" Artie shouted, but Dick stopped him as he would have darted back over the bridge.

"The mothers know," he said. "When I gave you the riddle, I explained that whichever one won it was to be the guest of honor at Fair Isle Park for a day, and that the other five should go along as an escort of honor. Hop in, children, hop in."

They needed no further invitation, and in another moment they were rolling off down the road toward the next town.

"So that's why Mother made me put on a clean

white blouse," said Jess. "Funny I never guessed."

They knew now the reason for the order that clean blouses must be donned that day and shoes, not sandals worn. But, as Margy put it, "the best guesser in the world" would never have been able to guess what was going to happen.

They reached the Landing after a two-hour drive, for there was a detour, and, besides, Dick wanted to take them over roads and through country they had never seen. They parked the car near the ferry and went over to the island on a little silver and green ferryboat that looked, beside the river boats, like a plaything.

Dick Hare was a perfect host, and he seemed to know without asking what they would like to do. First they had dinner, which Ward was allowed to order, even to the three kinds of ice-cream at the end.

"Do you think it is polite to order three kinds?" asked Jess, anxiously, who, as his sister, felt responsible for Ward's behavior.

"Of course it is polite," answered Dick, quickly. "I've always myself wanted to try three kinds at once. We may make a discovery."

After dinner they began to tour the park. Dick's idea of touring was as simple as it was delightful. You started at one end of the island and

went through everything till you reached the end. Scenic railway, shoot-the-chutes, mystic mazes, magic mirrors, haunted houses—they tried them all. Not a popcorn booth, or a peanut stand, or a lemonade well, did they pass by. Dick said he thought he could stand it if they could, and whether it was the excitement or the complete mixture, not a child had one "queer" feeling then or afterward, though they ate three times as much food as they usually did and walked twice as far.

They had their fortunes told by a machine for a penny; they visited the "sky" in an airplane that was securely fastened to the ground; they went up in the ferris wheel, and Artie thought he could see River Bend, but was not quite sure; they went down into coal mines and diamond mines; they peered into the top of a volcano; they rode the fascinating little ponies; and they tried to hit dolls and roll wooden balls, and they each went four times on the merry-go-round.

In between the popcorn and the peanuts and the lemonade and the candy, they had frankfurters and rolls and rice cakes and waffles and milk and grape juice.

By four o'clock they had actually been into every attraction the park afforded and had certainly tasted everything in the way of eatables that was to be served.

"Wasn't it lovely?" sighed Margy, leaning against Polly, as they started home. "I never, in all my life, had such a good time!"

Each and every one said that to Dick Hare when he let them out at their own familiar bridge, and he said that he felt well repaid if they had been happy.

"Don't forget that I've had a wonderful day, too," he told them. "No, Polly, thanks, but I can't stay for supper. I've a big day ahead tomorrow, for the guests are beginning to come up for the carnival. I don't believe I'll see you people before the parade Saturday afternoon."

No one said anything about being "bright and fresh" for the next day, but all six members of the Riddle Club went to bed early that night by mutual consent. And they spent the next day in telling Miss Perry and Miss Spencer of the good time they had had and working on their float, which was already finished except for a last touch or two.

"I wish we could win the prize," said Margy, as they walked home toward evening.

"We can't have all the luck," replied Artie, thoughtfully.

"No, but I do think our float is the prettiest," persisted Margy.

"Carrie thinks theirs is," Polly pointed out. "I

think the sensible thing to do is not to fuss. Either we get the cup or some one else gets it."

The next morning, Fred suggested that they walk in to meet the boat from River Bend which was to bring the three fathers and, presumably, many excursionists who would come for the water carnival. The walk seemed short to them now, they had taken it so often, and they were lined up on top of the wharf piling when the morning boat tied and the gangplank was put down.

"There they are!" cried Artie. "Oh, Dad! Daddy!"

"Hush! There's some one with them," said Polly. "Who is that man?"

"Two of them," whispered Fred. "Some one I never saw before."

"Maybe they invited them to come to the carnival," said Jess, reasonably.

"But they didn't write and say they were bringing company," declared Margy. "Maybe we're out of bread or soup—or something."

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEWS FOR THE HERMIT

THE Riddle Club continued to stare as the people streamed off the boat. They were so interested in trying to discover who the strangers were that Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson and Mr. Larue had reached them before they thought to jump down from the piling.

"Hello, youngsters!" Mr. Marley greeted them. "So you all came? Mr. Adams and Mr. Kirby, I want you to meet the entire membership of the Riddle Club—Margy and Fred Williamson, Jess and Ward Larue, and Polly and Artie Marley."

The two strangers bowed and the girls and boys nodded a little shyly. Who could Mr. Adams and Mr. Kirby be?

"We'll take the bus to the bridge. Do you suppose we can get it, Fred?" asked Mr. Marley.

"Dick Hare just left with a load," replied Fred. "But he'll be back in ten minutes—he truly will. And the other hacks and buses aren't much. I don't think some of them are safe."

Mr. Marley laughed. He understood Fred perfectly.

"You're trying to save our trade for Dick," he said, smiling. "Well, I think we can wait ten or fifteen minutes. Here's a shady place. It will seem good to have a quiet moment—the boat was crowded."

"It's the carnival, Daddy," Artie reminded him. "This afternoon, you know! You ought to see our float!"

"So you're going to be in the carnival, are you?" asked Mr. Adams. "I hope we'll be able to see that, too. From your father's account, it must be a very pretty affair."

"Oh, you'll see it!" Polly assured him impulsively. "We're all going—I mean all the people in our camp. Even Mr. Field. Miss Perry said to bring as many as we chose. If you're going to stay at our camp——" she paused and looked doubtfully at her father.

"We were talking, coming up on the boat," said Mr. Kirby, unexpectedly, "about whether you could keep a secret or not. I'm inclined to think you can, now that I've seen you."

He was a little man with a round, red face and bright dark eyes that seemed to be always smiling.

"I'm inclined to think you can keep a secret," he repeated. "So I'll tell you something and, a

little later, why we don't wish it talked about outside your own home circle. Mr. Adams here and myself are cousins of this Mr. Field you speak of. Mr. Marley very kindly telegraphed us at Rye, our home city, and we came to River Bend yesterday."

"Then his name is David Field!" said Polly, while the others simply stared.

Margy declared afterward that she pinched herself to see if she were dreaming.

"But it hurt, so I knew I was awake," she explained.

"Yes, his name is David Ellis Field, all right," announced Mr. Kirby. "And he isn't crazy—just odd and forgetful. He's nearly eighty, though your father said he would never believe it."

"He wandered away from his home nearly two years ago," Mr. Adams took up the story, "and though we searched and advertised, we couldn't get trace of him. I think now that it was because he must have gone straight into the country and we had the cities watched. He is so passionately fond of music that we thought he would be unable to stay away from concerts and recitals."

"But he hasn't lived on Triangle Island for two years," said Fred. "Dick Hare said since last February."

"We'll probably never hear of all the places

he has lived," answered Mr. Kirby. "When he left home he carried a suitcase well filled with clothing, and now I understand he wears a red dressing gown and an old straw hat."

"Oh, Daddy sent him some things to wear after he hurt his leg and we wouldn't let him go back to the island," said Margy.

"We'll never be able to thank you for all the kindness you have shown him," said Mr. Kirby, feelingly. "He is such a dear old man and so unused to roughing it that we have hoped against hope every stormy night since he disappeared that he had shelter. It was so good of you to take him in."

"Now—now," protested Mr. Williamson, "we can't have you making these children uncomfortable, and that goes for their mothers, too. Camp Riddle was only doing the neighborly thing. You know the law of the woods as well as we do."

"Very well, I'll subside," said Mr. Kirby, his eyes twinkling more than ever. "But that doesn't alter what Will and I think."

"Are you going to take the hermit—excuse me, but that is what Lake Bassing folk called him—home?" asked Ward, curiously.

"Yes. And that's the reason I'm asking you to say nothing about our trip," said Mr. Kirby. "You see, we'd like to get David back to his house

—he lives with an old sister who has been nearly frantic about him—and, if possible, let him think he has just been away on a visit. Old folk sometimes have these lapses of memory, the doctor tells us, and once back in familiar surroundings, with his beloved organ and violin at hand, we hope David will forget his experiences for the last two years. If the people in Lake Bassing don't know he has gone, till it is too late to question him, it isn't likely that they will ever know where he lives or ever be able to refer to him as 'the hermit' should they, by chance, run across him in Rye."

"Yes, they'd want to know where he came from and how you found out he was here and if he was poor and what made him come to Lake Bassing," said Polly, wisely. "It will be much nicer, if they don't know anything about it. We won't say a word, and Miss Perry and Miss Spencer won't, either. They like poor Mr. Field so much."

Dick Hare and his car came back just then and the party for Camp Riddle climbed in. Dick may have had his suspicions about the strangers, especially as the children were too excited to talk naturally and in spite of themselves would mention the hermit occasionally, but he said nothing; merely spoke of the carnival crowd and asked if the Riddle Club float was ready.

"All ready," answered Polly, dimpling. "Are

you going over to Harry's Island and sit in the reviewing stand, Dick?"

"No such luck for me," he answered cheerfully. "I'll be busy every moment this afternoon, taking ladies who are too late to see the carnival to the lake because they won't take my word for it, but insist on seeing how late they are for themselves."

Mr. Kirby laughed and said that driving a bus must bring its own amusement.

"It does," Dick declared. "But here's the bridge for Tom's Island, sir!"

Mrs. Marley and Mrs. Williamson and Mrs. Larue, while surprised to meet the cousins of the hermit, were not so astonished as the children had been. They had thought that if the old man had relatives living in Rye, it would be most natural for some one to come for him.

It was interesting to see the meeting between the old man and his cousins. Mr. Kirby walked up to the hermit as though he had recently parted from him and held out his hand.

"Hello, Cousin David," he said heartily. "How well you look! We thought perhaps you were ready to come home, so we came up to get you. Here is Will, too."

The old hermit's face broke into wrinkled smiles.

"Well, well, Tony," he said warmly, "I *am*

glad to see you. And you, Will. How is Lottie? Does she think I ought to be home, looking after her?"

Lottie, Mr. Kirby said afterward, was his sister.

"She's mighty lonesome without you, Cousin Dave," said Mr. Adams, gravely. "She wouldn't want to cut your vacation short, but she'd be glad if you would come home with us."

"I'll go right away!" exclaimed the old man. "Just as soon as I see this water carnival they tell about."

The campers from River Bend left the old man talking to his two cousins, while they went off to get ready for lunch, which was to be served early. As soon as they had eaten, Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson rowed the children over to the island where the artists lived and then exchanged the rowboat for the float.

Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson were to row the float, and as soon as the children were in place, they started for the head of the lake where the parade was to start. The others in camp were to walk by way of the road to the landing opposite Harry's Island, where the power boat would meet them and the other guests invited to share the reviewing stand.

At the head of the lake an official examined the

Riddle Club float to make sure it was "seaworthy," and the children had a good chance to see the other entries. There were thirty or so floats entered by the various summer camps and by individuals, and a dozen entries in the children's class.

"Where's the Conundrum Club float, do you suppose?" whispered Margy to Polly.

"The Conundrum Club?" repeated the official. "Oh, they had a power boat entered, and that's against the rules—likely to ram the boat ahead; so they're off somewhere trying to get a tow."

By a quarter of two the procession had started. First came two boats carrying the bands, then a boat built like a gondola, in which were the Lake Bassing town officials. The floats followed, in single file. Some of them were very beautiful and some were funny, while others were grotesque. The children's floats were placed at the end of the line, and the Conundrum Club led, for the only boat willing to give them a tow was one which carried six oarsmen.

"It's a pretty float," said Polly, when she saw it. "But I honestly don't think it is as pretty as ours."

The Conundrum Club float represented a camp-fire, with the club members sitting around it, but they were so closely grouped that it was difficult

to make out the different figures. They didn't dare move, once started, for fear the planks on which the "fire" was arranged might tilt. The expensive electrical effect which made the fire would have shown to better advantage at night than under the glare of the afternoon sun, too.

The Riddle Club float was a birch bark canoe filled with young Indians. The canoe had been loaned by Miss Perry and it was fitted securely on the rowboat, completely hiding Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson from sight as they rowed. Ward and Artie, being the smallest and lightest, crouched at either end, dressed as Indian braves. The sun flashed on Fred's tomahawk and on the brilliant strings of glass beads worn by the girls. Over their heads, arranged on two wires that were invisible unless the sun caught them, were the words "Riddle Club" worked out in delicate green vines. It looked as though suspended in the air and seemed to glide gracefully over the water with the white birch canoe.

The reviewing stand burst into cheers as the Riddle Club float passed them and went on to the line. There every one had to turn and proceed slowly back. The winners were notified to fall out by the dipping of a purple flag, the judges' colors, as they passed the stand a second time.

"He dipped for us!" gasped Jess, as they saw

the purple flag lowered and raised again.
"There's only one prize, and he dipped for us!"

"Perhaps it is a mistake," suggested Mr. Marley, resting on his oars.

"No—no, they're waving!" cried Fred.
"What do you know about that! Turn in toward the landing! Gee, here comes some one with the silver loving cup!"

The float was turned in and presently scraped against the side of the wharf.

"You don't suppose we really won it, do you?" murmured Margy, in awestricken tones.



A BIRCH BARK CANOE FILLED WITH YOUNG INDIANS.
The Riddle Club in Camp.

CHAPTER XXV

MORE GOOD NEWS

It is to be feared that the Riddle Club did not appear to the best advantage when the presentation of their prize was made to them. They were too dazed to be quite certain of themselves, and they quite frankly stared at the man who came to them and escorted them before the reviewing stand.

He did not bring the cup to them—the excited Fred had seen the sun glistening on his metal badge and leaped to the conclusion that he was carrying the cup—but the judge, when he had congratulated them, stood up and gently lowered the shining thing into the arms Fred held up to receive it. At once Fred passed it to Polly, who made a curtsy. Every one in the stand clapped, and then the prize winners from another float, in another class, came up the wharf to receive their prize, and the Riddle Club was free to go.

Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson rowed them home to their camp, and there they found an ex-

cited group awaiting them. The reporter from the county weekly was there, anxious to get their names. A photographer insisted on taking a picture of the float with the Riddle Club in their places. As soon as he heard about the club and understood, he promised a print for their club-room. Then he took a picture of the silver cup.

"But you won't need a picture of that, for you have the real thing," he said, smiling, as he folded up his camera.

The news spread quickly, and all that late afternoon and into the evening people kept coming to see the prize. Miss Perry and Miss Spencer were delighted, of course; and Dick Hare, when he heard to whom the prizes had gone, dashed up to congratulate the winners "flat tire and all," as he said.

"That cup is going to look stunning in our club-room," said Polly, contentedly. "Look what we'll have to take home with us when we go—the cup, and the sketch Miss Perry did of us, and the picture the man is going to send."

"And my prize compass," added Ward.

"And the radio set—don't forget that," the old hermit reminded her.

He did not look much like an old hermit tonight. His eyes were bright and he wore the suit

Mr. Marley had brought him from the store. He had enjoyed the carnival thoroughly, and no one had cheered louder than he when the judge awarded the silver cup to the Riddle Club.

"Look, Fred—company!" cried Ward, in a shrill whisper.

They were seated around the campfire and Fred glanced across the flames to see the members of the Conundrum Club filing in. They had to be introduced to Mr. Adams and Mr. Kirby, but they hardly waited for that courtesy before Carrie asked to be shown the cup.

"Of course a great many people think the judge was a poor one," she said, coolly. "He's new, and I suppose he just didn't know about floats and things. Every one was surprised when you won the cup."

Fred had gone into the tent to get the cup, and now, as he handed it to Carrie, Mr. Kirby observed that he thought the decision had been very fair.

"And I never heard heartier cheering," he said pleasantly. "We were in the reviewing stand, and every one there thought the judge made a fine choice."

Carrie did not answer. She was examining the cup.

"It's larger than I thought," she said enviously.

"And heavier. What is this plain space for?"

"That's where they engrave the date and the name," Margy explained. "Daddy is going to have it sent away and have it done. It will say, 'Awarded to the Riddle Club, Boat Carnival, Lake Bassing,' on it."

"We're going to keep it in our clubroom," said Jess.

"It's kind of a silly thing, though, isn't it?" suggested Mattie Helms. "You can't use it for anything, I mean. It's too large to hold flowers, and you'd never want to drink out of it."

"But it means a lot," said Ward. "Mother said we can be proud of it all our lives. Didn't she, Jess?"

"I don't call it much," declared Joe Anderson, rudely. "When I win a prize, I want it to be something I can use."

"Of course we didn't have any help with our float," said Stella Dorman. "That's the reason we took a power boat—no one told us it wasn't allowed. It must be easy to win the prize, if you have two artists telling you what to do."

Polly's cheeks crimsoned.

"They didn't!" she said hotly. "They said we could have anything of theirs we wanted," she added, a little more temperately, "and they gave us their boathouse to work in. But we thought

up the whole idea and did every bit of the work ourselves."

Carrie did not look convinced, but as Mrs. Marley brought out a large box of marshmallows just then—Dick Hare had sent them, she said—and invited the visitors to stay for a roast, she wisely decided to say nothing.

The next morning Fred and Jess and Polly were coming in from a before-breakfast swim when they were surprised to meet Mr. Kirby. He had walked around the island, he said.

"You know we're going to take Cousin David home to-day," he told them. "And while I'm not saying a word, I'm sure you know how we—Will Adams and myself—feel toward you. Any time any of you wants something, all you have to do is ask for it. What are you smiling about, young lady?"

"I was just thinking," said Polly, her eyes dancing, "suppose we should want something big?"

"Well, ask and see," said Mr. Kirby. "By the way, where did you tell me those youngsters were from who came to the camp last night?"

"They are camping out on the next island—you can see their flag from here, sir," answered Fred. "They call their place, 'Camp Conundrum.'"

"Why, that's almost like 'Camp Riddle,' isn't it?" asked Mr. Kirby.

"Well, they live in River Bend, too," explained Jess. "That is where we live, you know. They are members of the Conundrum Club. Last spring we had a contest. They go to the same school we do, too."

"I see," Mr. Kirby nodded. "Didn't they have some kind of pin, or badge, on? I thought I saw something of the kind."

"They're the Conundrum Club pins," explained Polly. "They're solid gold, and they cost a lot of money."

"Haven't you any pins?" asked Mr. Kirby.

"Well, we could have," said Fred, who, as treasurer of the Riddle Club, knew its finances very well indeed. "We could have, but of course we couldn't have expensive pins like those. We have some dues saved up, but we kind of hate to spend the money now we have it. All we could get would be cheap pins, and the girls made us some badges to wear that aren't so bad."

"They are yellow question marks, embroidered on dark blue ribbon." It was Polly who described them. "We wear them when we hold our meetings."

"Anyway, we have a clubroom of our own up in the Larue barn, and that is more than the Co-

nundrum Club has," said Fred. "They have to meet at different houses."

"Our room is all furnished, and it is lovely," declared Polly, contentedly. "I wish you could see it, Mr. Kirby."

"Perhaps I shall, some day," he said. "Now run along, because you may be late for breakfast, if I keep you."

After breakfast Mr. Kirby beckoned to the members of the Riddle Club, saying he had something to tell them. He had asked a good many questions of Mr. Marley and Mr. Williamson and the others, and really knew a good deal about the club and its members.

"I've been thinking about the pins the Conundrum Club has," he announced. "I'm interested in that sort of thing, because that's my business. I'm a badge and emblem maker. Now I think it is too bad that a club as nice as this one shouldn't have any pins. Of course, home-made badges are fine, but something a little better wouldn't come amiss."

They stared at him and his eyes twinkled back.

"I wouldn't advise you to use your club dues to buy pins," he said seriously, "for I don't approve of draining the treasury unless it is absolutely necessary. What I am planning to do is to present you with six pins."

"Us? Pins?" babbled Margy, awe-struck.

"Club pins, you mean? One apiece?" asked Polly, dazed.

"Like the Conundrum Club?" said Jess.

"If you approve of this design, O. K. it, please," said Mr. Kirby, in a businesslike tone, handing a small sketch around the circle. "The background will be dark blue enamel and the question mark inlaid gold. The backs of the pins will be solid gold, of course, and fitted with guard pins. And the name of the owner will be engraved across the back."

What could they say? He had to guess from the six happy faces, and apparently the answer satisfied him.

"You won't get them much before Christmas," he said, folding up the sketch and putting it in his pocket. "We're busy now with orders for the Christmas trade, but the pins will be made up this fall. I'll mail them to you as soon as they are ready."

The Riddle Club saw Mr. Kirby and Mr. Adams and their old cousin off—Dick Hare and his bus called to take them to the boat—in a delightful haze through which club pins and silver loving cups and Christmas holidays were merrily blended. Although it was August, Christmas did not seem so far off, since it was to bring them

their beautiful pins. And it was to bring them more than that. But if you want to know what happened to the Riddle Club then, you'll have to read the next book about them, to be called "The Riddle Club Through the Holidays."

"Maybe the Conundrum Club won't be surprised!" chortled Artie, as the bus and its passengers disappeared down the road.

"Don't tell them," cautioned Fred. "Mum's the word. Don't give a peep. Some day we'll walk into school wearing our pins and their eyes will pop out of their heads."

They told Miss Perry though, in the days that followed, and Miss Spencer. Dick Hare, too. In fact all the friends they knew would rejoice with them in their good fortune.

The water carnival was really the close of the season at the lake, and a number of the cottages were closed, and some of the camps, too, the next week. The two artists stayed on, and Mrs. Marley declared that she saw no reason for breaking camp until the week before school opened.

"I'll have to make Polly new dresses, for she has grown so," she said. "I don't believe she has a dress left from last year that she can wear."

They were all brown and strong and well and merry, as far as that went. None of them was especially anxious for school to open; though,

once started, they knew they would be happy there, too.

"We're going home to-morrow," Carrie Pepper announced, appearing in Riddle Camp one evening. "Mother wants to have a week at the seashore before she has to get me ready for school. I wanted her to let Mattie and me stay with you, and Joe Anderson wanted to stay, too, but Mother said she thought it wouldn't be best."

When Carrie had gone, Jess gasped, wholly speechless. Polly looked at Fred. He laughed. Artie and Ward, as usual, fell into each other's arms and rolled over on the grass. Margy giggled.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Mrs. Marley, trying to look grave.

"I'm laughing," said Polly, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, "at the idea of Carrie and Mattie and Joe staying in camp with us!"

And Mrs. Marley had to laugh a little, too.

THE END

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